APRIL, 1937

WEIRD TALES

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APRIL

Weird Tales

25c

All Stories Complete

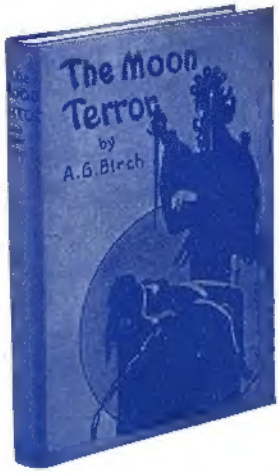
SYMPHONY of the DAMNED

an unusual story of gripping power and mounting horror

by JOHN R. SPEER

August W. Derleth
Edmond Hamilton
Earl Peirce, Jr.
Julius Long
Robert Bloch

The Phantom of the Ether



The first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*

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"Communicate this to the various governments of the earth:

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"Second: All war vessels shall be assembled—those of the Atlantic fleets midway between New York and Gibraltar, those of the Pacific fleets midway between San Francisco and Honolulu—and sunk.

"Third: One-half of all the monetary gold supply of the world shall be collected and turned over to my agents at places to be announced later.

"Fourth: At noon on the third day after the foregoing demands have been complied with all existing governments shall resign and surrender their powers to my agents, who will be on hand to receive them.

"In my next communication I will fix the date for the fulfillment of these demands.

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"KWO"

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A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Symphony of the Damned

By JOHN R. SPEER

Blasting through a thousand radios, the Black Song carried its message of destruction into the minds and souls of its listeners—an unusual story of gripping power and mounting horror

1. *Helgar Gaudet*

A GREAT invisible audience listened in silent rapture to strange music, sweet and flowing like the soft, rippling notes of a wood-song from some sylvan pool where tranquil lilies float in cool, white splendor. Silver drops of April rain falling upon the warm, brown earth. Golden sunshine inviting the fields to live again. The whole world blooming in the springtime! That was the way Helgar Gaudet's music affected the enchanted millions who heard him play, the night of the fatal broadcast.

Out from the tall, slender tower of the Metropolitan Studio, through the heavy ether of night, his symphony carried a flower-scented melody to your ears.

Who could resist the impelling strains of Helgar Gaudet's music? His music? No! The music of Satan, the evil strains of that dark song of medieval sorcery brought to life again to perform with more potency than ever before. Helgar Gaudet's hell-born orchestra was playing *The Black Song!*

Even now, after all that occurred later in the studio, they doubt that Helgar Gaudet played music made to drive men mad. How could they know, this modern world that smugly believed it had exposed as trickery the Black Arts of the Dead Ages? This scientific world that had produced with machinery even greater magic than Hecate had proclaimed possible over her brewing cauldrons on the wild, wind-ridden heaths of Scotland!

If you heard him play that night, you will recall how his music conjured up pictures of exquisite beauty in your mind. You closed your eyes and listened. Everything that was good and lovely paraded before you.

But what was this? Somewhere in the glorious tapestry of sound, a strange high note kept recurring. It jarred and grated. Perhaps you thought at first some incompetent player was spoiling heaven's music with his off-key fumbling. But after the first shrill sound had pierced your ears, the whole screaming note had no longer the effect of an accidental discord. With damning significance it belonged to the soul-decaying symphony.

But for a chance in the days to follow that fateful performance those same fiendish notes would have pursued you. Everywhere you went they would have echoed back to you, in the sounds of the street, the running water in your tub, the scratch of your pen upon paper. They would have been there, pursuing you as relentlessly as they did François Currier, the French critic who killed himself; as they still pursue Lorraine DeBreault, the actress, now screaming in a madhouse of Paris, the doctors unable to calm her.

HELGAR had not always known such power with music. In Paris, ten years after the city had ceased its quaking from the fears of German air raids, he

"Tomorrow madness will reign supreme."

had only the hope of great power to come.

It was a warm afternoon late in August, and the long day of rehearsals had transformed the usually gay interior of the Théatre de Gabrielle into a shadow-haunted workhouse. Even young Rodney Prisney, whose American dollars were financing this operatic experiment of Helgar's, was weary of the whole business. Helgar Gaudet was a heartless director in rehearsal. He raged, he threatened and bullied his performers; and when all else failed, he made violent physical attacks upon them.

For a while Rodney had been amused at this sort of theatrical bombast, but now gossip columns were speculating upon just what he would lose through his affiliations with the opera—all of his money, only half of it, or would he escape with just the loss of his heart to Maria Martell?

Although Rodney was paying out money at a faster rate than he liked to think about, he was not concerned with that at all; it was his heart, for he had lost that long ago to Maria. Only a man in love would have sat through those long hours of rehearsal as he did, hearing

again and again the songs he had heard at least a hundred times before.

Rodney watched Maria now as she tried so hard to please the critical ear of Helgar. Her soft, lovely face looked so pale and helpless in the dim light that shone down from the flies of the stage. He had tried two hours ago to persuade her into leaving the rehearsal and getting away from the stuffy theater, but she had refused.

"No, dearest," she had said, "I can't do that. Helgar needs me. His opera must be perfect when it opens; you know that."

And so she stayed and rehearsed; she stayed, and took the slanderous insults that Helgar hurled at her when she failed to please him. What was more, she seemed not to mind what he said to her in rehearsal. Of course Rodney knew that she was no doubt used to all of that, but just the same it was unpleasant to hear her talked to in the manner Helgar used. And Helgar Gaudet was supposed to be in love with Maria also! If that was love, Rodney thought, it certainly wasn't his idea of expressing it. Opera or no opera, he wouldn't keep Maria going at the pace Helgar had set.

He decided to try once more to stop the rehearsal.

"Hey, *maestro*, how about a little rest?" he called down from his seat in the box. "That ballet of yours looks like a bunch of wilted orchids."

Helgar turned and smiled coldly at his patron. "*Monsieur* does not realize that perfection is demanded of a ballet, even though the charming ladies may not appear so beautiful. Their make-up will hide their weary looks but not their clumsiness. Again, Maria, sing your last notes, and please pay less attention to the left stage box!" These latter words Helgar almost hissed. "This is not ordinary music that I have written. It is something different, and we must rehearse and rehearse, and then rehearse some more! It must be perfect."

Rodney gave up quietly. There was little he could do if Maria insisted on staying. He could stop Helgar Gaudet, probably, but that would not please Maria; so the only thing he could do was wait while they "rehearsed, and rehearsed, and then rehearsed some more."

Indeed Helgar Gaudet had not written ordinary music. In any number of respects it departed from the conventional. Helgar knew that unless his effort pleased Paris (that meant pleasing the critic, François Currier) his career would be over. If François Currier chose to be pleased with the opera, the papers would carry his praise to all of Paris. Helgar would be famous. But if the music did not meet with Monsieur Currier's admiration, all of Paris would be laughing at the reviews the critic would write. Helgar had known the power of François Currier's withering paragraphs on several occasions.

With this knowledge well in mind, he was all the more irritated when a second violin squeaked discordantly.

"You fool, you blind, deaf, dumb, inexcusable fool!" he screamed from his stand in the orchestra pit. "Can't you play? Can't you read music? Have you forgotten even the first principles of it?"

"I'm sorry, *maestro*, but I am so tired," the unhappy violinist offered meekly.

"Tired!" shouted Helgar, running his hands through the heavy, black hair that swirled thickly over his head. "You are tired? We have no time to be tired. Tomorrow night this opera opens. No one will care whether you are tired. Will François Currier say of my opera, 'It was very poor, but that is excusable because a second violinist, Monsieur Enré, was tired?' "

He rapped vigorously with his baton

upon the stand. "Again—we take that passage again!"

THE wretched orchestra seemed to sigh in unison as they resumed their playing. Maria smiled limply from the center of the stage as she began her song. The empty seats in the theater stared back at her sullenly.

"Stop it! Stop it!" Helgar pressed his fingers into his ears. He shook his head with exaggerated pantomime of pain. "Maria, where is your voice, the voice I taught you to use? Or do you remember that any more? While I realize that there are many who would be content with that pretty face of yours, it is not enough. You sing like a fish-wife!"

Rodney left his seat in the box, and hurried through the stage door. He would not hear Maria talked to in such a way any longer. He would take her away from the rehearsal by force, if necessary.

She saw him starting for the stage, and shook her head, her eyes telling him that she did not want him to make a scene. He paused unwillingly in the wings.

"I am sorry, Helgar. Perhaps if I had a drink of water I could do better," she ventured gently.

"Water? Certainly, my dear. You may have gallons of water if it will help your voice. Champagne if necessary. Where is that simpleton, Feroch? Where is the cringing idiot? I sent him for refreshments an hour ago. One could die of thirst before the dumb brute would bring them. Feroch! Where are you? Asleep somewhere, I suppose. I'll crack your skull, you simpering, hunchbacked, contemptible——"

Helgar's further discussion of Feroch, his only servant, was interrupted by the little man's cowering appearance upon the stage. He was carrying a pitcher of water that was rapidly spilling from his trembling grasp.

"I am sorry, *monsieur,* but I thought——"

"Sorry! You are always sorry, you ugly clown. Be careful! The lady only wants a drink, not a bath, you clumsy clod!"

"It's all right." Maria took the pitcher from Feroch's shaking hand, and drank slowly. "Thank you, Feroch. I feel much better now."

He bowed to her, grateful for the smile she gave him, and took the pitcher again.

"Well, go on—get off the stage, and out of the way!" Helgar shouted. "Don't stand there bowing and scraping like a lover saying his first good-bye."

"*Oui, monsieur,* I am sorry, I——"

Feroch hurried into the wings in time to dodge the heavy book that was thrown at him by Helgar. In his hurry and fright, he pushed headlong into Rodney, who caught him before he fell.

"Oh, Monsieur Prisney, I am so sorry! I did not see you. I am so clumsy. Did I hurt you? I am so——" Feroch began another series of apologies, which Rodney laughingly stopped.

"It's all right, Feroch. Calm yourself. Don't bow up and down to me. I'm not a temperamental artist—just an American fool in Paris!"

"No! No! *Monsieur* is not a fool. He is the kindest man I have ever known," Feroch said earnestly.

Rodney smiled, and looked down at the little fellow, pitying him.

BREATHING heavily, her eyes startled into brightness by Helgar's further raging, Maria sang with greater force, but it was not enough; it was not pleasing him, she knew. He was flaying her with unmerciful language.

"I can't stand this any longer. I'm going to stop him." Rodney started from the wings, but Feroch's hand restrained him.

"Please, *monsieur,* it will only make

matters worse for her. She will not want you to do it," said Feroch.

"Perhaps so, but how can I stand by and see him treat Maria this way? I love her, and the sooner I tell that music-mad composer the better!"

"Oh, no, no, *monsieur!*" There was fright and concern in Feroch's voice. "My master is a very strange man. It is as you say—music-mad. He has only two loves. One, the greater, his music—and then Maria. If you tried to take her from him, he would——"

"What, invite me to fight him?" laughed Rodney, throwing back his head and shaking the blond ringlets that topped his handsome face.

"He is more shrewd than that, *monsieur*. He would plan some slow doom for you both. Oh, I have seen him watching you these past few months. He knows that it was something more than his music that prompted your generous writing of checks for this production. He is well aware of your love for her. But just as he considers this music his very own, so he considers Maria. He took her from the cheap restaurants she used to sing in because she was poor and needed money—he took her from them, and trained her voice. It is his voice, he thinks—his own creation within the beautiful case that is Maria. He gave her that voice, it is true, *monsieur*."

"That is all very well, Feroch, but does he have to browbeat the girl simply because she does not always sing to please him? Let him take his voice: I'll take Maria, if she will only have me. I'll take her away from all of this. If she wants to sing, she may do it in America."

"Oh, *monsieur*, I would be so happy if she would go away with you. But she is loyal to Helgar Gaudet. She is not one to forget quickly, even though love may call her. Oh, she is so good and kind, *monsieur*. I would be so happy for you both if—if it could only be."

"Then start getting happy, Feroch, for I am going to see that it is."

"I would miss her though, *monsieur*. I would miss you both. You have been the only people who were ever kind to me. When the *maestro* is angered with me and wants to beat me, she persuades him not to, even refuses to sing for him if he does. She is like an angel."

"Yes, like an angel!" Rodney repeated fervently. "But why do you stand it, Feroch, this cruelty from your master?"

A wry little smile crossed Feroch's countenance. His misshapen shoulders shrugged. "*Monsieur*, I am not the most competent of men, nor am I a very handsome sight to have around. I was very fortunate when the *maestro* gave me employment. I have been with him for many years. Few would have me, I know. Really I am fortunate with my lot, bitter as it often is."

Rodney was forced to admit to himself that perhaps Feroch was right. His little body seemed shriveled and drawn up close about his large head, which was covered with coarse, bushy hair. His teeth jutted out repulsively above his upper lip. Only his eyes prevented him from appearing too hideous. They were soft and kind, swimming continually with a mellow hurt like the devoted eyes of a dog appealing to his cruel master not to beat him.

Two, three, four more hours, Helgar's baton waved from the orchestra pit like a whip lashing over the heads of his musicians. At last he was forced to dismiss the company; he too had become weary of trying to bring music that just now seemed to be gone from the score.

"Tomorrow morning at nine sharp everyone be here. You were terrible, I am

sick of you, but what can I do about it? Go, all of you—get out of my sight!"

He passed his hands over his eyes, which were burning from the long hours of strain, and then dropped into a coma. Feroch waited patiently with Helgar's hat and cane. Maria dropped upon a chair near the footlights. Rodney was at her side, holding her hands and cursing mildly to himself. The rest of the company had hurried out, glad to escape from the theater. The auditorium was dark and echoing with sounds that came in from the streets now lighting up for the evening's gayety.

Feroch was the first to notice the old woman as she hobbled down an aisle of the theater. A strange feeling of unexplainable dread came over him. Slowly she walked to the center of the orchestra pit, and glanced over the music. Her eyes lighted with a green brilliance. It was not so much the sight of the old woman that disturbed Feroch—it was the ring she wore upon her finger.

The old woman began humming to herself the score of Helgar's opera. Helgar awakened quickly from his stupor of exhaustion to behold a filthy-looking hag, whose dirtied brown lips parted over yellowish teeth that broke off in jagged scallops. She seemed quite unconscious of the attention she was attracting.

"Who can she be?" asked Maria.

"She's an evil practitioner, whoever she is," Feroch answered in a very low but serious tone.

"What do you mean—evil practitioner?" Rodney asked, half amused at the apparent weight Feroch had given the words.

"A witch, *monsieur,*" Feroch whispered. "You may laugh, but I still believe in them. Notice her face, her hands; notice that ring upon her finger. That is no ordinary trinket or mere piece of jewelry."

"Nonsense! Are you trying to tell me that she has unnatural powers, or something?" Rodney laughed.

"Listen to what she is saying." Feroch cupped his hand to his ear.

The old woman was smiling wickedly into Helgar's face as she said, "I fancy your music, *monsieur.* Some of it is quite acceptable. Yes, some of it—quite good, *monsieur.*"

Helgar chose to be sarcastic.

"I am sure you flatter me, madam," he bowed elaborately. "But unless you do me the honor of leaving immediately I will see that you dine this evening in the bastille."

Her cackling laughter made him suddenly angry. Helgar started quickly as if to evict her himself.

"Please, *monsieur,* do not be angry with me. I shall leave. I only came to wish you success for your opera. I know that it means so much to you. But your music will not mean as much to those who listen to it. No, they will not see quite all that you have dreamed of, *monsieur.*"

Despite his anger, Helgar was amazed by this ill-gowned old woman's apparent knowledge of his composition.

"You intrigue me, madam. Perhaps I have under-rated you? Could you by any chance be a famous opera diva whose opinions upon music I should know?"

SHE laughed again. Her long fingers reached for the music of his overture. Her voice became soft and refined as she spoke of the music. Maria and Rodney leaned closer over the footlights to listen.

"Perhaps *Monsieur* would do well to hear my opinions. I am the only one in Paris who will ever understand what you really tried to do with this music. You have dreamed of the power music may have over man's imagination. With that end in mind you have attempted to write

music that will capture their minds completely. You give them both beauty and ugliness. The very theme of your opera is that beauty is always destroyed by evil. In your overture you picture the beauty of life, beginning with the first bud of spring, and ending with the final cruel death of winter. You inspire a picture of flowers blooming in a field where two lovers find also the blossoming happiness of their own hearts. Then——"

"Yes, yes, go on," Helgar said impatiently.

"Then you bring into your score the onslaught of a destructive force. You have tried first to inspire beauty; then you try to destroy it with this overwhelming force that is evil. But you do not fully understand what that force is. No one will understand it, *monsieur,* because you have failed.

"Your idea is not new, nor is it impossible. Three centuries ago a great song was played. It accomplished what you have dreamed, and then went on to greater heights. Ah! If *Monsieur* knew the music of that song, his opera would not fail as it will tomorrow eve."

"You mean to say that you think my opera will be a failure?" Helgar scowled.

"A miserable failure, *monsieur.* All of Paris will laugh at you. They will call your music crazy. François Currier, the critic, will destroy you in his paper. Tomorrow night, *monsieur,* your opera will die the same as your flowers and lovers die upon the stage."

"Bah!" Helgar, impressed though not willing to accept her prophecy, sought to dismiss it quickly. "You are a gloomy old hag, and I will hear no more of your babbling about songs three centuries old. Pretty soon you will be wanting to sell me a manuscript of your own writing. My music will not fail."

She laughed again. "We shall see! We shall see! Tomorrow I will be here to witness your grand performance, *monsieur.*"

Now Helgar laughed. Maria and Rodney were also forced to laugh at the thought of the evil-smelling old lady sitting in the opera house during a première performance. She would never be allowed to purchase even a seat in the very last balcony, reserved for the less opulent lovers of music.

"Come, come, I've had enough of this." Helgar pushed her rudely. "I have no doubt that the charming madam has already arranged for the royal box, but I have no time to listen. I shall wait until you arrive tomorrow night with all of your jewels and finery."

At this she turned upon him suddenly, her long fingers thrusting out in front of her like tongs upon a fork. On one was a strange ring, dull and dirty-looking, yet distinctive in its design of a twining serpent.

"I have a jewel or two, *monsieur!*" she flashed. "You do not believe what I have told you, but tomorrow night you will have to. Tomorrow night, *monsieur,* your opera will die!"

The hag turned and hobbled up the aisle, laughing in her cracked voice, laughing all the way until the doors of the theater shut out her laughter, leaving only the echo of it in the empty auditorium. That emptiness seemed to hold only the whispering prophecy: "Tomorrow night, *monsieur,* your opera will die!"

2. *A Weird Visitor*

RODNEY PRISNEY realized the truth of the old hag's statement on the next evening, although he credited her with nothing quite so mysterious as the possession of occult power—mere intuition; he himself should have known the opera would fail; there was something too dis-

concerting about the entire theme. The music was wild and unnatural, sometimes sounding like the hissing of wind through a cleft in the mountains, again like the full force of a cyclone sweeping across the prairie. The audience was more distressed than impressed with it.

Between the acts Rodney strolled through the lobby trying to get as much of the audience's viewpoint as possible, although he felt sure that they would all be agreed upon one thing—Maria's beauty and charm.

François Currier, the critic, beamed with happiness, because there was really nothing he liked better than a chance to turn his sharp wit upon a poor production. Only Maria had been spared from his ill-favor. Rodney swelled with unconscious pride as he heard the critic discussing the opera as far as the first two acts.

"Her face is the only approach to music that I have seen in this—this—shall we say cat-calling affair? In twenty years of musical reviewing, I have never heard such perverted sounds, nor have I seen such beauty in a woman upon the stage. The opera is hopeless. There is only one advantage to the man's music."

"And pray what is that?" asked one of the ladies of his party.

"It is sure to boom the aspirin business. My head is already splitting from his sounds."

This comment was passed from one to another. Everyone laughed because François Currier was an accepted wit as well as an authority; it was smart to laugh at what François Currier said. And he enjoyed it. He was warmly anticipating what he would really do in his review the next morning.

But Helgar's opera did not need the killing comments of François Currier to make its death complete. It was truly dying before the audience. Aside from the fact that the entire theme of the opera was neither appreciated nor understood, there had been a series of casualties back-stage, enough of them to wreck even an outstanding success. A baby spotlight had fallen on the stage during the second act. The curtains caught and dragged down a flat of scenery at the end of the second act's most important scene. Lorraine DeBreault, one of the leading characters, sang hopelessly off key. Victor Vazzeli, the tenor, forgot his lines. Of the entire cast, only Maria gave the slightest hint of talent.

Helgar, wielding his baton, vainly trying to breathe life into the dead performance, realized his defeat. For a moment he hated Maria for her beauty and charm, but he could not blame her because his music was not appreciated. It was more that he saw in her success the freedom that she would gain from him. She would no longer need his help. She would be greater than he was, after tonight. This lovely poise and beauty that he had given her, this voice that he had trained, would never be his. It would go to the young American with his money and his youth.

Oh, if he could only have the power to make his music capture them. Why couldn't music hypnotize them? What notes, what chords would give him this power? How he would like to make that smirking critic bow to him! How he would like to feel that his music held them helpless! What joy it would be to turn and behold that sea of disinterested and politely bored faces suddenly entranced!

Casting occasional furtive glances over his shoulder to the audience, he caught a disheartening glimpse of François Currier looking coldly down upon him. He knew what the man was thinking, and what he would do to him. His mind filled with hatred for the critic, for his

power. In his helplessness before the silent audience that condemned his music, in his desperation of mingled jealousy and hope, he thought also of the hag and her prophecy. Could music such as she spoke of really exist—music that did what he had tried and failed?

When it was over, he ran them all from the theater, told them he never wanted to see their faces again. He was through! The flowers that came pouring back-stage for Maria enraged him all the more.

"It is your form they like," he said to her bitterly. "You sing with it. They did not care about my music because they could not understand it. You are what they understand. Every man in the audience held a clandestine affair with you in his mind."

"That's enough out of you!" Rodney stepped forward threateningly.

"Oh, you do not like that?" Helgar laughed harshly. "You are not content with taking her from me; you want more —you want to deny me the privilege of telling her what I think. Very well then, take her. Oh, she will go with you gladly enough."

"Oh, please, Helgar—why must you talk this way?" There was disappointment in her voice. She could not understand the bitterness of his thoughts. If the music had failed, she had not, but wasn't she his own creation?

"Oh, go on. Out of my sight. I am sick of you—sick of everyone. Don't stand there taunting me with your love for each other. Take it and go. Go to America with its high standards of art, Maria. They will appreciate a pretty face and figure. They won't care if you sing like a crow. Nor will you care, so long as you may have your success. You are happy, smug and content with your art. Take it, give it to this young American fool; his dollars far outnumber his brains. Take your success and eat it! Eat it!"

Maria fled from him in tears. The other members of the cast accepted his denunciation of their ability, and humbly folded up their make-up kits; they were almost glad to be leaving. Only the tempestuous Lorraine DeBreault ventured to say something on her behalf. She was to regret this later.

"You blame us?" Her black eyes snapped. "You poor maddened fool! You think that anyone could make your music sound right? You took a frog's song, croaking to its mate, and tried to make it beautiful. You—you impossible composer of discordant sounds! Wait until tomorrow when François Currier reviews your opera. He will say who was to blame for this evening's wretched performance. He will say that no one could make anything of your impossible music."

"Get out of here! Out, I say!" Helgar whitened with rage.

Lorraine DeBreault left with a final contemptuous toss of her head.

Slowly Helgar walked to his dressing-room. He felt weak and tired; his anger and disappointment had exhausted him—but it was still there, smoldering with dangerous fire that wanted to flare up again, to destroy something, to avenge the hurt to his egotism.

Feroch watched his master quietly but with fright and dread. He knew from Helgar's look what was coming. He knew all too well that somehow his master would reason that he, Feroch, who knew little or nothing of music, had caused the failure of his opera. This was a part of the meanness of his job—as much a part of it as helping his master don his coat, or shine his shoes. When there was no one else to be made the

object of Helgar's rage, there was always Feroch.

"Well, don't stare at me like that, you blithering, thick-skulled dolt! Are you happy that I have failed? Does it give you secret pleasure, you ugly whelp?"

Helgar made as if to strike his cringing servant, when the door of his dressing-room suddenly opened. There was a rustle of silk and a silvery tinkle of jewelry. The room lighted mysteriously. In the doorway appeared a strange woman of breath-taking beauty.

Her lustrous eyes surveyed Helgar quietly. The raven hair that framed the sharp yet distinctly beautiful lines of her face seemed to be sprinkled with the sparkle of many precious stones. Her silken dress was of red flame. It was as if she stood in fire, only her face showing soft and cool above it.

She smiled slowly. "May I come in, *monsieur?*"

Her voice was a deep melody. With assured tread she entered the room. In her hands she clasped several sheets of a very old manuscript.

Feroch trembled and his eyes opened wide in terror as he recognized the serpent ring upon her finger. The ring now seemed alive—the serpent was brilliant with many colors, and it moved as if it were alive, a suddenly aroused reptile preparing to coil and strike. He did not like to believe what he was now thinking.

Helgar's thoughts were speeding back to the prophecy of the hag. Could this be—she spoke, and then he knew it was —yet——

"You do not recognize me, *monsieur?*" she laughed. "I told you that I would be here tonight to see your opera. And I brought my jewels and finery. Now may I talk with you—alone?"

Feroch bowed and hurried from the room, closing the door behind him. Panting heavily, his heart thumping with wild bewilderment, he leaned against the door.

The rest of what occurred in that dressing room only Feroch could tell, as he heard it from outside. What he heard no one believed, not even Rodney Prisney, who should have listened to him.

3. The Black Song

"YOU must believe me, *monsieur,*" Feroch pled the next day with his friend.

Rodney listened kindly, but with little faith. He was too happy over the thought of sailing with Maria to America.

"I can't promise to believe you, Feroch, but I will listen to your story." Rodney laughed. "It will amuse me until two o'clock. Then Maria and I have an important engagement with a man who sells jewelry. What can you expect me to believe of such a fantastic story anyway, Feroch? I'm too happy because Maria has consented to marry me, but even if I wasn't happy I couldn't believe a story like yours. First you tell me this woman was an old hag, that unspeakably hideous old woman we saw in the theater, and now you tell me she was the most beautiful woman a man could ever see. Impossible, Feroch!"

"Oh, I know it sounds unbelievable, but I saw her with my own eyes. There she was, standing there, just as he was raising his hand to strike me. The way she appeared there—it wasn't real, and neither was anything she said, but I heard it, *monsieur.* I listened at the door.

"She spoke about the failure of his music. He told her he did not wish to talk of it. Then she asked him to play a piece of music for her. I saw it in her hand when she came in, a faded old manuscript with ragged edges and yellowed pages. He finally consented to play it on the piano that was in his dressing-room. I listened. I tell you, *mon-*

sieur, I have never heard music so beautiful.

"He played at first slowly, as if he didn't care. But later—as he played—it was like a mad race of sounds. Then the music stopped abruptly in the very middle of a bar.

"He begged her to give him more of it, saying, 'It's glorious, divine—but it is not complete. Pray, give me the rest of it. I must hear it all.'

"Then she said, 'Most men have regretted hearing the end of this song, *monsieur.*'

" 'Bah! They were fools!' he said. 'No man with a human heart could resist it. It is everything I have ever tried for in music. It is beyond me. I would give my soul for that music.'

"She laughed softly, and said, 'Your soul, *monsieur?* Ah, how easily men bandy that word about! They would give their soul for the woman they love, their soul for a loaf of bread and a piece of cheese when they are hungry. How many men really would give their soul if a market should be found for it?'

" 'I would give anything for that song,' Helgar said.

" 'Your soul?' she asked.

" 'Yes, yes, my soul!' he said.

" 'I see you are not a very religious man,' she laughed, and then asked more seriously, 'Do you believe you have a soul?'

" 'Of course I do,' he answered her, 'although I do not spend all of my time in contemplation of it. I live for my music. It is there that I come closest to my soul. My sins may be many upon this earth, but I am still young enough to live with them. When I grow very old, I shall do something about redeeming my soul.'

" 'But if you gave your soul away for a song, *monsieur,* it would not be yours to redeem.'

" 'I do not care,' he cried impatiently. 'I want that song, and I will do anything to have it.'

"Then she answered, *monsieur,* an awful answer. It made me tremble. I have prayed all morning to the Blessed Virgin because I fear for all of us. She told him that she belonged to the Supreme Master of the Evil Force. She was Satan's and the music he had just played belonged to her master.

"Oh, I know what it is, *monsieur.* I have read in old books of this music—it is the *Black Song.* No one can hear the entire song without losing himself for ever. She said so herself. She said that to have this music was to possess a great power over mere mortals. From what I have heard of the song, I know that she is right. It has not been played on this earth for three centuries."

RODNEY by now had become quite interested in Feroch's story, but his interest was more in what he believed was a fine exhibition of a superstitious mind concocting fantastic tales, than in the sincerity of his story.

"Three hundred years is a very long time, Feroch," he said soberly. "Where did you say you heard of this—this what do you call it—the *Black Song?*"

"From my old tutor, *monsieur.* You see I was not always poor. My father was once a prosperous business man. We lived in London, and in Italy, and many places on the Continent. During my childhood I had my own tutor, because of our traveling—and because of my misshapen body it was not pleasant to go to a common school. Old Professor DeFoe, my tutor, had many books on the forgotten arts, and many stories that he used to tell me of things no one talks of today. He believed in them."

"Then that explains it," said Rodney. "You were impressed early in your life

with these stories from a seemingly harmless old professor. No wonder you can tell such a tale to me. It is your imagination running riot with you, Feroch. I have no doubt that you slept while Helgar entertained some lady—who it was, I don't know or care—but please, Feroch, no story of a *Black Song,* or an ugly old witch who turns into a beautiful woman in the evening."

"No, no, I did not sleep, *monsieur.* I was as wide awake as I am now. I heard it all through the door. She spoke of Helgar's ability to play and understand great music. Then she told him of a three-century search for another mortal who would dare play her song. The last possessor had gone to join his soul, she said. She did not talk of herself as an ordinary person. She spoke of centuries, of old courts, and kings, and empires.

"This music was her possession, the gift she bestowed upon those who found favor with her, and proved daring enough. She spoke of a long, wandering search for a mortal man who would again be her lover.

"It was then that he seemed to go mad over her beauty, forgetting his love of Maria entirely. She told him that those who touched her lips at night kissed fire. He swore that to touch such beauty he would risk all the fires of eternal damnation. Then, *monsieur,* he kissed her!

"She said, 'You have taken the first step. The coming dawn prevents you from going further. Think well of what I have told you. Consider your soul, if you will. Tomorrow evening I will return here. Then, if you desire the bargain I will make, you shall have your music.'

"He pleaded with her to stay, but she hurried out of the room. I ran away from the door, and hid behind a costume trunk. I did not want her to know that I had been listening. She hurried down the corridor of the dressing-rooms; and as soon as I thought it safe, I followed her to see where she went.

"I tell you, *monsieur,* I heard her slam the stage door that leads into the alley. She went past old Papa Pierre, the doorkeeper. He was awake, but when I asked him if he had seen a beautiful woman in red silk go out the door, he laughed. Yes, he laughed at me, *monsieur,* and said, 'If you mean that monstrosity who must be a bat come to life in human form, I have seen her, but no beautiful woman has come by me this late hour!'

"There was no other way for her to leave the theater from where Helgar's dressing-room is located. She had to go through that corridor and out the stage exit. I dashed into the alley—and there, chopping along the cobblestones and darting in and out of the crooked lane, was only the form of the old woman in the same ragged dress she had worn that day. It was the hag!"

FEROCH finished breathlessly. Surely Rodney would believe some of what he had told him.

"An excellent story, Feroch," applauded Rodney, "but I advise you to tell it for just that—a story."

"Oh, please, *monsieur,* if you doubt me, come there tonight. We'll hide in the theater and watch. You will see that she is not a character of my imagination. I tell you it is unholy. Please come with me. Don't you realize that with the power of that music the *maestro* could take Maria from you? He hates you, and he could make you a victim of its spell. Please say you will come. She will be there at midnight."

"Let her be. I shall be with Maria, and tomorrow we will be sailing for America. Now I've given you too much of my time already. If I listen to any

more, I will be forced to think you have been using hop. So on with your hat, Feroch, and out! Let Helgar Gaudet have his evil lady with her satanic music, and let's hope that her music is not as awful as his own."

He clapped Feroch's small hat upon his head, whirled the little man around until he was dizzy, and then sent him, still objecting helplessly, out the door.

That night Feroch cautiously secreted himself within the theater. The place was deserted; Helgar had arranged to send everyone away; even old Pierre, the door man, had been given five francs and told to go home and stay there until the next morning.

Midnight was approaching, and Helgar paced alone up and down the empty expanse of the dark and deserted stage.

He did not know what manner of strange contract this mysterious woman would present, but he did know that this music meant everything to him; it meant power, a supernatural power. He would have it even at the price of his soul.

There came a silken rustle and a silvery tinkle of jewelry. . . .

4. *An Unholy Wedding*

FROM his vantage-point high in the scenery loft, Feroch watched the weird rites that took place. The mysterious woman of the serpent ring had returned as she had promised. Helgar proclaimed himself ready to risk everything for the possession of the music.

"Then you must join the circle of my master, surrendering to him your soul." She spoke in deep tones of heavy meaning. "Know you now, Helgar Gaudet, that there are only two forces in the world; the force of evil and the force of good. The weak, the timid are within the circle of good, and they eat humble bread for it. When you give up your soul to my master, you come into power. My master has many gifts of power to offer to those who would serve him. Some are endowed with shrewd minds for collecting gold, some rule the fields of battle. My gift was the ring of immortality, and this song. Down through the centuries I have carried this song to those who wedded me for it."

Walking slowly about him as he stood upon the darkened stage, she drew a circle of fire.

"This is your last chance to retain your soul. If you would weaken, say so now," she warned. "You are standing within the first inner circle. Speak to me if there is fear in your heart, my bridegroom. Soon comes the Master to wed us. My song shall be my dowry to you."

Helgar remained silent.

With a wild cry, she whipped from her bosom a dagger, and plunged it into his breast. Feroch covered his eyes in horror. But when he opened them, he found that Helgar was still alive, and that the dagger was now plunged into the woman's breast. Blood dripped red and hot from its hilt.

From Helgar's breast a thin, blue, vaporish ring of smoke curled slowly upward and vanished into the air. The ring of fire closed in and danced about them. From out of it came a voice that rumbled like distant thunder.

"Dost thou, Helgar Gaudet, take my loyal daughter for thy eternal wife?" asked the booming voice.

From out of the flames came Helgar's answer, "I do!"

"Dost thou, my daughter, Morella, take this man for thy wedded husband, to serve him faithfully as thou hast done me as long as the power of the ring shall last?"

"I do!" answered Morella.

From her hand she withdrew the ser-

pent ring. Placing it upon Helgar's finger, she spoke again.

"This ring is a symbol of the power of my master. For centuries I have worn it. Nothing can harm me when it is upon my finger. But were I to lose the ring, then my power would die, and I would go to join my soul. But with this ring you and I will go on for ever. My blood is within your heart, and yours within mine. The ring is upon your finger. It has joined your life to mine. In this one moment, to prove my love for you I have risked mortality."

Hastily she withdrew the ring from his finger and placed it again upon her own.

Feroch's senses reeled. He felt as if he would faint. Indistinctly he could hear the chant of the third voice completing the unholy wedding. The flames blazed higher, seeming to touch the ceiling, yet having no effect upon it. This was a fire of Satan's own control. He had brought it for the festivities, a fire that did not destroy, but only transferred the soul of Helgar Gaudet to its vault in hell. Feroch could feel his lungs bleeding from the phosphorus fumes. His hand gripped tighter about the little crucifix he wore.

Feroch closed his eyes, and felt the pain of his lungs that cried out to be relieved; yet he dared not make a sound. When he opened them again, the flames were gone. The air was clear and still. Helgar and Morella stood clinging to each other. The unholy wedding was over!

When Helgar untwined his arms from about her form, she spoke: "And now, my husband, you shall have your music—all of it."

Eagerly, almost greedily, Helgar grasped the moldy pages of the manuscript she extended to him.

"It is mine! *The Black Song!* At last I have it! The music of life and death!" he cried excitedly; then he paused as if he had suddenly felt cheated. "But who will ever play it for me? No mortal musicians could play this. They would go mad in the attempt."

"No mortal musicians will play it." Morella smiled. "You shall have your own orchestra, an orchestra that knows no discord."

From outside in the alley there came a wild howling like a pack of hungry hounds. Morella laughed gayly as she ran to the stage door and pulled it open. Upon the stage there rushed forty mangy dogs, barking wildly as they clamored about Helgar, who stared at Morella with open amazement.

"Your orchestra, my love! Lead them to their places. They await only their leader." She gestured to the orchestra pit.

Helgar walked slowly down the steps of the stage, the hounds following. He raised his baton and stared about him. The orchestra pit of the theater was now filled with musicians—not dogs, for only their faces resembled their canine selves. All were dressed in immaculate evening clothes; all had the same long jaws over which their noses extended only slightly; all had the sharp, pointed ears of wild hounds. Their hands, covered with coarse hair, held properly each musical instrument. Their eyes followed the end of Helgar's trembling baton. He held it above his head for one breathless moment; then it began to sway with meaning. For the first time in three centuries the music of the *Black Song* swelled upon the air!

FEROCH did not linger. Climbing from his seclusion in the loft, he hurried from the theater as quietly and quickly as possible. Behind him he could hear the strange, impelling, irresistible music that was soon to sing its death song into the ears of those who listened.

As dawn approached, the musicians departed, barking and baying to the moon

that was paling in the sky. Helgar's beautiful vision of Morella was fading as he kissed her, his eyes closed with rapturous delight.

Suddenly alarmed in the grim, gray light of morning, Helgar found himself holding the hideous form of the old hag in his arms. Her breath was stinking of decay as she croaked, "It is morning, my lover. You and I will always be cursed with morning, for then I must return to my miserable shell, while you forget the night's beauty. Now you think of that angelic Maria! I see it in your eyes: you love her now, but you shall never have her, for each night my beauty will return to recapture your heart!"

Helgar shrank from the repulsive sight. His heart chilled with wild terror at the grim realization of what his life would be.

Maria's vision of loveliness tormented his mind. He was overwhelmed with an intense hatred for the ugly old woman who stood before him.

Maria! He must have her. She was the only one in the world to help him now. Her sweet lips of purity would cool the blood-red stain of his own burning lips—the lips that had kissed away his soul.

5. Maria Goes to Helgar

It was late in the afternoon when Maria went to Helgar. Rodney had not wanted her to go, but she felt she owed a brief explanation to Helgar. She found him alone, brooding sullenly over his piano. All day long he had been trying to see her, and now she had come to him. And soon it would be evening! Soon he would have his power.

He did not rise to greet her. He allowed his fingers to wander over the keyboard—ever so carefully—as if they were searching. . . .

"You are leaving with him, I suppose?" he asked coldly.

"Yes, tonight. We sail for America tonight. Oh, Helgar, can't you see that I love him? I came here to tell you that. You must understand it. It is something I cannot help, something stronger than all else in me. I know that I owe you a great deal, more than I can ever repay, but I cannot love you."

Helgar was playing softly. He did not look at her, but he was smiling—the music was beginning to come!

"Yes?" he said. "Come and look at me, my dear. Come, stand in front of me while I play. Tell me what you said again."

Maria moved in front of him.

"I love Rodney," she said.

His fingers touched a crashing chord. He stood up, a strange light showing in his eyes. Shadows were beginning to fill the room. A heavy purple dusk was descending upon Paris. Soon he would have the full force of his music with him. He could play for her. She would never leave him then.

"Helgar, please! Don't look at me that way. Please! You don't understand."

"Listen, Maria—listen to this, my dear!"

He sat down again and began to play. This time his fingers touched the keys with familiarity. The first chord of the evil song was struck; it resounded in the darkened room like a bell-note from out of the doomed past.

Maria stood transfixed. She heard the call, she heard his words whispering, beckoning to her.

"You cannot leave me, Maria. I need you. Do you hear my music, Maria? It is the music of power and wealth. You cannot leave me now, Maria!"

"Stop it! Don't listen to it, Maria!" Feroch rushed into the room.

"You idiot!" Helgar wheeled about angrily.

"Go, Maria. Go to Rodney, Maria. He

is waiting for you." Feroch rushed her out of the room.

Helgar started for him savagely. He would have killed him, but in the doorway stood the glorious figure of Morella. She smiled, and he forgot all else except the passionate love of his wife, his wife and only love from evening shadows until dawn.

Maria in her fright did not hesitate, once outside of Helgar's studio. She was too anxious to find Rodney, to feel his strong arms about her, and to hear his assurance that he would always be with her.

6. *Suicide and Madness*

THE years passed with light and happy tread for Rodney and Maria. In America she at once found success. Helgar Gaudet was almost forgotten by them; only when they occasionally read of his unusual success in the capitals of Europe did he even enter into their conversation.

"The greatest composer and conductor of modern times," said London and German papers. "His First Symphony is unaccountably the most beautiful and thrilling experience a man can have. To hear him play is to believe in a superhuman power behind music."

Everywhere he played it was the same. Helgar, in public, played only certain parts of his *Black Symphony,* the parts that pictured beauty, that captured the imagination of the listener better than any known composer had ever done before. Those who had the misfortune to hear the entire symphony did not talk, at least not in a sane language.

Only Feroch could have explained the mysterious suicides that puzzled Europe for a while, but Feroch's lips were sealed with fright. Helgar and Morella knew that he could not talk. Who would believe his story?

Who would have believed the story of that fatal night when eight leading figures in the musical circles of Europe met their doom, among them François Currier and Lorraine DeBreault?

It was late in the evening, after Helgar had played a most successful concert, that they gathered in his sumptuous apartment. He had mildly suggested that they were to hear music few mortals ever heard.

"A new composition?" François Currier asked eagerly.

"On the contrary, a very old composition, Monsieur Currier," Helgar answered, smiling into the faces of his guests.

He sat down at his private pipe-organ, a gift from a wealthy admirer. Morella stood silently watching him, a thrilling picture of exotic beauty that all of Paris had whispered and exclaimed over.

Helgar's fingers wandered idly over the keys for a moment; his gaze moved from the sharp face of François Currier, now worshipful of his talent, to the face of Lorraine DeBreault. They who had been loudest in condemning his music were now at his mercy. At this moment he felt that perhaps his sacrifices were small in comparison with this power.

He played! The music flowed like liquid melody through the room. It seeped into the very core of its listeners' souls. It ran the gamut of every human emotion. Golden cities with castles of air rose up within the listener's dream; then they fell before the onslaught of his final score. Death rode a wild ride across the pages of their memory. The world that each built that night as they listened was destroyed; only for brief moments would it return to haunt them with its beauty. Each man and each woman saw the full extent of a dream come true, then saw the end—the end of everything—when Helgar stopped playing.

They were silent, awed, as he finished. The chattering, brilliant conversation that had pervaded the earlier part of the reception was gone. All of the beauty of life had been killed for them. A green fog of despair blurred their hopes. They all left like mourners departing from a church in which a funeral had just been held.

François Currier walked unsteadily down the avenue. His eyes were staring straight ahead. He looked into the bright lights of the Paris he had always loved for its tinseled beauty. Now it was ugly and sordid. Nothing he saw that night possessed any charm or beauty for him. He could only remember the glorious scenes he had pictured to himself as he had listened to Helgar's music—the awful feeling of fear that came over him at the thought of the evil vision he had seen later withering all the beauty of these earlier movements.

He tried to hum the more beautiful passages to himself, but nothing came except the sounds he so detested. The taxicabs tooted that sound! The buzzing moths near the flaming lights of the street hummed it. A man with bright, yellow shoes, shoes that squeaked the hideous sounds, limped past him.

Alone in his apartment, he tried to drown them out, but they closed in upon him from every corner. Covering his ears, he confronted himself in a mirror. He had grown ugly—the face he had considered handsome was now hideous to him. He stared into the madness of his own eyes. He screamed with torture as the music filled his brain. He cursed the sounds! Where could he go to escape them?

He threw open the windows of his apartment. A sigh of wind carried them in to him. Twinkling Paris was singing the horrible song. Stop them! He had to stop them!

François Currier leaped from his window, screaming a curse that followed his hurtling body as it bumped against the cornices, swept festoons of flowers from balconies and finally smashed upon the hard pavement eight stories below.

Upon the steps of the Good Shepherd Cathedral a puzzled gendarme discovered a woman, her clothes half torn from her body, her finger-nails sinking deep into the flesh of her breasts. Evident marks showed that by her own hands she had dug deeply into her ears. She was muttering incoherently to herself. The name —Lorraine DeBreault!

Within three days everyone who had been invited to Helgar's reception was either dead or insane. Now came others to his little receptions at night. He took care that those who came were wealthy men and women who could pay well to save themselves from a terrible fate. After they had heard the dread music, he told them of what lay before them. Realizing their fate, they gladly paid him huge sums of money to receive his treatment. To them Helgar offered frequent little concerts composed of the more soothing music he knew. Their lives became strangely parallel with that of a dope addict. Madness and death lay always before them.

Morella enjoyed the torture Feroch suffered, the torture of standing by, unable to cry out against this black magic that was working its way to great heights of destruction. If only someone would believe him, if only he dared to expose the power of the great Helgar Gaudet!

"I think that will be your eventual punishment, Feroch," Morella once laughed; "the ring of mortality shall be placed upon your finger. My Master will give you a long life to watch my powers working. Will you enjoy that, Feroch? Will you enjoy carrying a story no one

believes today; nor will they believe it tomorrow—always, always—a madman's story that is true?"

The ring of mortality! Feroch prayed constantly for the chance to strip it from Morella's finger. If ever Morella was to be defeated, it lay through the destruction of that ring, he knew.

Wealth and success were inevitable for Helgar Gaudet, but these were small compensation for a mind that knew no peace or rest. In the daytime he found himself seized with remorse and fear. This must not go on for ever, he told himself; yet he knew that it would. What a shallow thing this power really was! At night, intoxicated with passion and unearthly desires; by day a lonely man within whose mind there was a continual conflict of emotions.

As his evening's passion cooled with the dawn and Morella's terrible transformation, so warmed over the smoldering coals of it a new fire of desire—for Maria, for the sweet purity of Maria. He felt old and useless in the afternoons. He wanted sometimes to beat away the loathsome features of Morella as she walked through his apartment during the day—a silent, smirking old woman whose eyes stared hungrily at him.

A PICTURE of Maria smiling at him from the cover of an American magazine one morning was too much. He rang for his servant.

"Feroch, you will pack immediately, and reserve a cabin for us on the *Beresaulta*. It is sailing for New York this afternoon, I believe."

Feroch shuddered. "New York, *monsieur?*"

"Yes, New York. I have had many offers of engagements there, and besides" —he picked up the magazine, and ripped Maria's picture from its cover—"I have someone I want to see very much."

"Someone it would be best not to see!"

They both turned to see Morella's eyes blazing deep with hatred in her seamed and ugly face.

Helgar hesitated a moment, then said, "Do as I tell you, Feroch. We sail for America today!"

Feroch's lips moved in silent prayer. He prayed that the ship would sink rather than to have it carry Helgar Gaudet and his music into the happy lives of Rodney and Maria.

7. *Helgar Takes Maria*

THE New York papers were extravagant with their announcement of Helgar's arrival in America. Maria smiled pityingly as she studied the full-page portrait of him in the Sunday rotogravure. He seemed so old and tired-looking in the picture. His hair was streaked with gray, and there were lines of worry and pain about his eyes.

"He's aged considerably, hasn't he? The old villian!" Rodney laughed over his wife's shoulder at the picture before them.

"So very much. I—I almost feel sorry for him," Maria replied. "Only a few years, Rodney, and we have been so happy in those years. Poor Helgar seems to have lived centuries."

"The price of success, my dear. Perhaps now that he is so successful I should present him with a bill for financing that half-baked opera of his."

"Do you regret that opera, Rodney?" She looked at him.

"Not one penny of it, for it was there that I found you, my most adorable sweet," he answered, taking her in his arms.

"I wonder why Helgar came to America, Rodney?"

"To steal you away from me." Rodney

kissed her tenderly, and they both laughed at the impossibility of such a thought.

The telephone on her dressing-table rang. Maria reached for it with one hand, the other still grasping Rodney's warmly.

"Hello," she said. "This is Maria. Oh!"

Rodney felt her hand clench his tightly. He sensed her inner disturbance.

"Who is it, Maria?" he asked anxiously.

"Helgar!" she answered, holding her hand over the mouthpiece of the phone. "He says he must see me!"

Rodney scowled because of the look of fright in her eyes. She spoke again.

"I'm sorry, Helgar. It is very kind of you, but not this evening. No, please—I——"

"What is he saying to you?" Rodney moved closer to the receiver.

"No, really—thank you, Helgar—I can't listen to you. Please!"

She clicked the receiver down, and stared at it for a moment, breathing heavily.

"Darling, what did he say to you?"

"It was all so strange, Rodney. The moment he heard my voice, he started playing some music. It seemed so odd. He said he had come all the way to America just to give me a concert. He insisted that I listen to it."

"He's crazy," laughed Rodney. "What did I tell you? You see—he did come to America just to steal you from me. Strange way to serenade a woman, though—nothing very romantic about a telephone."

"I wonder," Maria said soberly, not at all in the same gay tone Rodney had used. She was thinking of those few wild chords of music that had come to her. Her mind raced back to that day in Helgar's studio. They were the same chords. They were calling to her. She wanted to listen, and now tugging at her was a little half-regret that she had not listened, and a suspicion that if Rodney had not been there she would have listened.

When a business acquaintance of Rodney's called, awhile later, she excused herself, leaving them to transact their business in the library.

It was quite late when Rodney finished with his friend, and he felt very tired and drowsy. For a few moments he sat before the fire in the library, his head nodding wearily. He told himself that he should really go upstairs to Maria. But the fire felt warm and inviting, and the short walk upstairs semed like a long distance, too long for a drowsy man. He lingered, his head dropped upon his shoulders. Before he knew it he slipped off into a heavy slumber.

When he awoke, he jumped with a start. Feroch was bending over him, shaking him frantically.

"*Monsieur,* wake up! Wake up. Tell your butler that I know you. I must talk to you, *monsieur.*"

"Feroch! What—it's all right, Conroy." Rodney dismissed his butler, and took hold of Feroch's arm. "Now you sit down, and calm yourself. You look like a startled ghost."

"Oh, please, *monsieur,* don't jest with me. I have come to warn you. It is Maria—she has gone to Helgar's, and he is——"

"Don't be silly, Feroch. My wife is upstairs in her room."

"See for yourself. Call her if you will," demanded Feroch.

Although Rodney knew she was in her room, he ran up the stairs, followed by Feroch. He called first—no answer. He opened the door—the room was empty. Hanging on its cord was the receiver of her telephone. Maria was gone!

"You see! He has lured her with his music. There was no way I could warn you, so I had to come here. Right now

she may be at his mercy—his and Morella's!" Feroch cried excitedly.

"See here, man, are you still trying to tell me a story about a——"

"Oh, *monsieur*, this is no time to doubt! You must come with me." Feroch tugged desperately at Rodney's sleeve. "Even now we may be too late. I tell you I have risked everything to come here. And unless you help, your wife will be lost to you for ever. For ever, I tell you!"

"But it is so ridiculous! So—strange that she would go there without telling me. By Jove, come to think of it, she did speak of his playing music over the telephone. Oh, but if I could only see——"

"See! See!" Feroch cried angrily. "Go to Harmony Hall when he plays his concert. Watch the musicians who play for him. You will see that they are not human. They are dogs! Mad dogs who play their night's concert and then disappear. Is the world blind? Why hasn't someone noticed them before? Must I always be cursed with a story no one will believe?

"Oh, *monsieur, monsieur*, while we have talked, he may have played that music. We have not a moment to lose. You will find him playing it for Maria. You will find her listening, unable to help herself. You will see Morella watching while the music destroys Maria—destroys her mind, makes her a mere pawn in the hands of two who have no souls. Morella will see that Maria is completely destroyed."

Rodney had no other choice than to hurry with Feroch. He took his roadster, and with absolute defiance of all traffic laws, made the distance to Helgar's apartment in short time.

He found Maria just as Feroch had said he would.

"Take her quickly, *monsieur;* don't listen to the music—take her!" Feroch urged him lest he too become a victim of the powerful melodies.

Rodney picked up Maria in his arms and carried her from the apartment. He heard Helgar's curse, and the hissing threat of Morella's voice, but he could not linger now. He was too much concerned with Maria. How long had she been listening to the awful music?

Maria was staring at him wildly.

"Why did you come for me?" she asked. "What is it, Rodney? Oh, why did you do it? I was listening to Helgar play. I have never heard music like it. Why did you make me leave? Rodney, I'm afraid! The most horrible sounds are beginning to ring in my ears. I heard beautiful music while he was playing, only once did I hear a sound—a sound like what I am hearing now. Rodney, it's all I can hear now—that sound. Take me back to Helgar's. Oh, why did you come? Why? Why? Let me go! These sounds! I can't stand it! I hate you! I hate you! I want to hear the music!" She screamed, and her fingers dug deeply into the pink flesh of her ears.

Rodney felt himself go suddenly rigid with terror. He had been blind. Feroch had not imagined this nightmare of horror. It was all true! Here was its awful proof—his own wife, slowly, surely going mad before his very eyes.

8. The Radio Broadcast

DOCTOR SORENSON, an eminent authority on psychotherapeutics, diagnosed Maria's condition as the result of too much imagination placed wrongly upon the value of music. Rodney did not mention many facts of the case; it still seemed to him a fantastic, unexplainable story.

"I recommend that your wife be taken to a place where she may find rest and absolute quiet. She has been working too

hard, no doubt. These artists are often subject to hysteria of this sort. Do you have a cabin anywhere in the mountains?"

"Yes," Rodney answered. "We have a small hunting-lodge in the Adirondacks."

"Splendid. Take her there. I will engage two special nurses, and we shall go there at once. She must not hear any music, not even the sound of a radio. We will keep her completely quiet, and I am sure this will all pass within a very short time."

As Rodney watched Maria struggling to free herself from the strong hands that held her, he realized the impossibility of any such speedy recovery. In the little cabin in the mountains where they had gone many times for pleasant week-ends it was necessary to strap Maria to her bed.

Rodney realized the impossibility of ever convincing a doctor or any other modern-thinking person of the real cause of Maria's derangement. He knew that medical science could be of little help. He was utterly helpless—unless—— His only chance was to go to Helgar himself. Helgar Gaudet would have to save her. Rodney would make him save her.

Leaving Maria with the nurses and the doctor, he hurried to his car and sped back to the city.

Pushing his way through the blockade of servants, he found Helgar pacing alone up and down the long expanse of a spacious music room. The room had been done in the style of an old castle. At one end, sunlight streamed through high Gothic windows. Deep red draperies fell at intervals along the gray walls where suits of armor stood like sentries. At the other end of the room was a pipe-organ with its spires of dull brass tubing reaching to the high-vaulted ceiling. Morella had gone to great trouble to recapture the effect of an old castle in this very modern apartment. Even the radio had been concealed in a suit of armor.

The radio was playing softly; Helgar had just finished dialing away a program that offered swing music, and was now bringing in an organ recital. Rodney confronted him, clutching a small automatic pistol in his hand.

"Of course you know why I am here," he said, leveling the gun at Helgar.

"Yes, I know. But put that down, it will not do you any good." Helgar waved the pistol aside as if it never existed.

Rodney flushed with chagrin at the uselessness of modern weapons when dealing with the power of something he could not fully believe or understand. He pocketed the pistol and glared at Helgar.

"Now where have you taken Maria?" Helgar demanded.

"Far enough away to keep you from destroying her mind any more with your infernal music."

"Then Feroch told you everything?" Helgar seemed more worried than angered at this.

"Yes, everything. He told me before we ever left Paris, but I laughed at him. I still find it hard to believe. And if it is so, why have you done it? What do you think it has gained you to drive my wife insane?"

"It was not my intention to drive her insane. That is your fault. You took her from my playing at a very inopportune moment. I do not know how much you may have learned from Feroch, but you must understand that I am the only one who can ever save Maria. I must play for her the more soothing passages of my music. They will restore her sense of beauty again. We do not have a great deal of time. Another few hours, and she may be beyond all help. Where have you taken her?"

"To my lodge in the mountains. It is nearly a seven-hour drive from here. We could take a plane, but the nearest we

could get to the cabin would be a three-hour drive."

"Oh, you fool! If you had only come to me sooner. Now——"

"You mean she will die——"

"Unless I can reach her within the next few hours, her mind will be gone completely. There is no way, unless——" Helgar's fingers toyed with the dials upon the radio; his eyes lighted suddenly. "I say, do you have a radio at this—this hiding-place you have taken her to?"

"Yes, but I have given orders that it is not to be played. The doctor said that she was to listen to no music whatsoever."

"It is simple, then. Retract that order, and I will play for her tonight. I have already accepted an engagement to play over the air. For my program, I will play the music that will help Maria."

"But how? There is no telephone at Lonesome Pine Lodge. The nearest telephone is twenty miles from there."

"Send the message to that place, instructing the people to hurry it to your lodge. That must be done. Hurry, man, there is no time to waste. We cannot lose a minute."

HELGAR looked anxiously out of the window. The afternoon sun was already beginning to cool. Fear and dread shone in his eyes. He was hoping against hope, he knew. Whether Rodney trusted him or not, within his own daytime heart, Helgar Gaudet had a desire to help Maria. But evening was coming on!

"But why, if you are so intent upon helping Maria now, did you play it for her in the first place?" questioned Rodney.

"Because of her—that woman—my wife. Feroch told you of her power. She made me play it because she knows the love I still have for Maria when it is daylight. Oh, it is true that I intended to win Maria with my music, but only so that I might have her as my own. Can't you see that she means the only clean and decent thing in my life? Don't stand there doubting my intentions. Send that message. For her sake, send it!"

Rodney did not hesitate any longer in sending the message to the little general store near Lonesome Pine Lodge.

While Rodney was sending the message, Feroch strained to free himself from the cords that bound him to a chair in a little room, concealed behind the draperies. Morella had bound and gagged him so that he could not escape the punishment she intended for him.

"Your precious friend has trapped himself," she taunted Feroch. "Would you like to warn him that he has made it possible now for me to kill his lovely Maria? Cry out, Feroch! Tomorrow morning your cries will be those of a madman, for tonight Helgar plays the complete symphony!"

THE sun blazed like a burning ship, then plunged into the purple abyss of the far horizon.

Morella appeared in the music room. Smiling bewitchingly at Rodney, she walked slowly toward him, the hand of the serpent ring extended before her. Helgar bowed his head. Darkness was outside.

"My wife!" Helgar had said, but Rodney did not hear him. From the first the ring had caught his eye; he stood entranced by the sudden, blinding flash of exquisite beauty that came before him.

An hour passed, and still another. Long ago Morella had said to Helgar, "You will play tonight, my husband, as you have never played before. Tonight you will play the real *Black Song!*"

Helgar had bowed with resignation and gone out of the room, leaving her alone with Rodney, who by now had become oblivious to all except the crimson vision

of beauty that stood before him with a green serpent ring, twining and twisting mysteriously alive upon her finger.

A burning desire flamed within him. Slowly her lips wandered across his brow, leaving a trail of fire as they moved down to meet his hungry mouth, her kisses that were the supreme height of tantalizing pleasure. Such maddening ecstasy he had never known. Gone was Maria, her lovely beauty, as if it had never existed for him. Gone were all of his thoughts of concern for the tortured soul that lay upon the bed in Lonesome Pine! All of Rodney's memories were now consumed in the flames of a desire to gratify his passion with the unendurable pleasure of Morella's embrace. It was as she had planned; soon she would mock him for the helpless mortal that he was.

Far away, through the miles of busy traffic, Helgar Gaudet stood before the great bronze doors of the Metropolitan Studio. He hesitated one moment before entering. Tonight he would play this evil music before the largest audience of his career. Millions would be listening, and somewhere in the mountains his symphony would fly with its wings of death straight into the fevered brain of Maria Martell!

9. The End of the Black Song

A SUDDEN unearthly scream pierced Rodney's ears. He withdrew from Morella's arms, and stared stupidly about him. The scream came again. Reality was returning to him. From behind the curtained wall, he could hear someone pounding, someone calling his name. It was Feroch.

"*Monsieur!* Help! Don't let him play it. Oh, God, stop him!"

Rodney heard sounds of crashing wood. He saw the red curtains on the wall suddenly sway out and fall from their securings. The curtains had concealed the door through which Feroch was now smashing his way.

When the door finally gave way, Feroch stood before them with his arms and face bleeding from the force he had exerted to free himself from Morella's bonds. A frayed and broken cord dangled from his waist.

Morella poised herself against the wall, her hand raised above her head, the finger with the ring extended outward. "You fool, I will kill you for this!" she said.

Before she could move to him or focus the gleam of the serpent ring upon him, he wrenched a cumbersome battle-ax from the suit of armor that was standing beside him. It was a very ancient suit of armor, a rare antique that Morella had purchased from a collector only a few days before.

A blue flash crossed the room in front of Rodney's eyes—a blue flash with a silvery trail of light. An agonized cry came from Morella's throat. Rodney felt a warm spurt of blood against his cheek. Upon the rug before him fell a human hand, severed at the wrist. The long scarlet nails of the ghastly hand clutched spasmodically at the rug. A serpent writhed in the throes of death upon the finger.

Feroch was laughing wildly and pointing to the wall, where Rodney saw the quivering handle of the ax, its blade deeply imbedded in the plaster.

"I've done it! At last, at last! I've killed her power! The ring is dying! Her life is over!" Feroch jabbered hysterically.

Morella fell upon her knees, her one hand eagerly clutching for the bleeding thing that lay in the center of the room.

Laughing horribly, Feroch pushed her from it.

"You see, she wants her ring, her pretty ring of hell. Her chance for eternal

beauty is gone. At last my prayers have been answered. Now die, you ugly hag, die in the form in which you belong."

Feroch's wild laughter halted suddenly.

Coming from the radio that had been playing softly throughout the evening was the crisp voice of the announcer: "This is the Cosmopolitan Network bringing to you the celebrated European composer, Helgar Gaudet, and his symphony orchestra——"

The *Black Song* with its unmistakable melody came trickling through the panel of the radio, filling the room with its command to listen.

"He's playing it!" Feroch croaked hoarsely. "Oh, stop him! That is the music of death. This is *her* plan, all of it. What did she care for the millions who would hear it? She wanted Maria's death. We must stop him. We must!"

From the floor came Morella's low, triumphant laughter, mingling with the sounds of the music. Raising herself so that her body rested upon the bloody stump of her wrist, she pointed with her other hand to the radio.

"You fools! I die, perhaps, but so does your lovely Maria. They will all die who hear it tonight. This may be the last time that the *Black Song* is heard on earth, but ah—the millions who will hear it! Tomorrow madness will reign supreme. Hear it, you fools? It is coming to the millions. My song is coming to the masses. Play on, my husband, play your Symphony of the Damned."

Rodney hastened to the telephone and tried desperately to explain to the girl at the switchboard of the studio.

"You must stop it. Tell them to stop it at once, I say. Listen to me—listen!" He clicked the receiver desperately, but the operator had disconnected him. Her laughter still mocked him.

"The police!" he shouted into the telephone. "Give me the police station." But before the sergeant at the desk had answered, Rodney realized how impossible it would be to make his statement sound sane. For a moment he stared helplessly at Feroch.

"They believed your story, my friend?" Morella taunted. "Try to tell anyone in this city about the music that destroys! Try to tell them tomorrow when they are all mad and dying in the streets!"

"The studio, Feroch!" Rodney hurried to the door. "We've got to reach the studio before he finishes. It is our only chance."

Followed by Feroch, he hurried out of the room and down the stairs into his roadster. "If we can only reach there before he has finished."

"We have twenty minutes, *monsieur*."

RODNEY shot his car forward into the evening traffic, gaining the center of the lane, and ignoring the damage to his fenders. The speedy little roadster groaned with the full force of its motor.

Skilfully maneuvering in and out among the busy streets they sped. A thousand thoughts and curses tormented Rodney as his foot sent the gas feed to the floor.

From his dashboard radio, they could dimly hear the insinuating strains of the music above the din and roar of his speeding motor. Feroch clicked the radio on and off at brief intervals to avoid becoming hypnotized with the music.

Rodney sickened with fear as he heard the whine of the motorcycle patrol. How could he ever convince them, if they were stopped, that he was speeding to prevent a man from playing music that meant certain madness for everyone?

A car turned suddenly in front of him. He threw his force against the wheel, and they rode upon the curb, narrowly missing a lamp post. The roadster lurched

crazily as they fought again for the center of the street.

All too well Rodney sensed the futility of hoping to reach the studio in time, but desperation led him on. People seemed to be flying in front of him. Night lights were stabbing his eyes. Precious minutes clicked swiftly on. The trailing skirts of death seemed to be riding just ahead of his radiator cap. The motorcycles were gaining on him. Not one extra ounce of power could be coaxed from his motor.

"We're nearly there. You stall them, Feroch. I'll try to force my way into the studio," Rodney shouted.

"I will. There is the tower. Oh, hurry, *monsieur*, hurry!"

Rodney's car groaned to a stop. The smell of burning rubber and the slowing whine of police sirens mingled with the rush of thoughts that were throbbing in his brain.

He jumped from the car, knocked over the door-man who attempted to stop him, and pushed his way into the elevator.

"Take me to the broadcasting-room—and hurry!"

He pushed his revolver into the ribs of the startled operator. The car shot quickly upward.

As he reached the broadcasting-room and hurried toward the stage, his heart sounded a death knell of defeat within his body. He saw the deserted stage. He heard the announcer mumbling something—but where was the orchestra, where was the audience?

A small group of ushers rushed at him, and he was hurried out of the room. In the corridor the police awaited him. Feroch was struggling to free himself from the grasp of a tall giant in blue uniform. Everywhere there was confusion.

Frantically in the face of their skeptical expressions Rodney tried to tell them about the music.

"It was the *Black Song!* The song of death! Can't you see? Where did he go? Are you all deaf and blind?" cried Rodney.

"The man's insane," he heard them say. "They're both crazy, no doubt of it."

An officer stepped forward and gripped Rodney tightly by the collar. "Come on, Mister. You're going with me. I've got enough charges against you to give you life. Babbling about that musician won't get you anywhere. If his music was so awful, no one got a chance to hear any too much of it. He dropped dead right in the middle of his broadcast."

"Dead?" Rodney gasped.

"Deader than last week's joke," the manager of the studio growled.

"Then that proves it," Feroch shouted eagerly. "The ring—it was her power of life for both of them. I killed the ring, and Helgar and the music died with it."

"Yes, of course." Rodney jerked loose from the grasp of the policeman. "Where are the musicians who played for him?"

"The musicians?" The manager blinked. "Why—why, they left, I suppose. I didn't notice. Everything was so 'egged' up. He had been playing about eight minutes, when with no warning at all he just drops in a heap on the stage. We had to switch the whole broadcast around."

"Come on, you two." The officer pushed them both into the elevator. "You are either drunk or crazy. I'll let the judge decide which it is."

Rodney's attorney bailed them out, and they refused to talk of their reason. Rodney did not care what they charged him with—drunkenness, insan-

ity, or what—no one would ever believe the story now—and he did not care. It was Maria that he was worried about.

Of course, back at the studio the janitor's story might have proved illuminating, but he never told it. He said nothing of the pack of wild, barking hounds that had come bounding down the back stairs, pushing him over as they rushed on out through the rear entrance and into the alley, disappearing into the night. Although the incident was strange enough, the janitor told himself that one might expect almost anything in a broadcasting-studio, and let it go at that.

Rodney and Feroch stopped at Helgar's apartment. Perhaps they might find something that would make their story a little more believable, but there was nothing. Morella was gone. The hand and the ring were gone. Only a black, foul-smelling spot staining the center of the rug remained.

Feroch examined the ax, which was still imbedded in the wall.

"Look, *monsieur!*" He pulled the ax from the wall. "Do you see the writing inscribed upon that blade?"

Rodney examined it closely.

"Why, it's an ax that was used in the Crusades," he said. "The inscription is engraved with silver——"

"For the service of God against all evil," Feroch translated the inscription reverently. "This antique was her undoing. This very ax was the answer to my prayers. It made it possible for me to sever from her the ring of mortality."

"But is she really gone, Feroch?"

"God grant she is!" Feroch crossed himself. "May this be the end of the *Black Song.*"

"But will it be? Will its music still linger in the minds of those who have heard it?"

"I do not think so, *monsieur.* Some may never recover from its music, but you saw those people tonight. They heard only half of the evil music. It was only beginning to capture them. Helgar's power was destroyed almost from the beginning of his performance. Perhaps Maria only heard enough of his music to sway her from herself. You remember he did not get to finish the song that first night."

"Yes, thanks to you, Feroch. Now we must hurry to Maria. Oh, if I hadn't sent that telegram!"

"God is good, *monsieur.* He will not let this music remain. The good songs will come to Maria again, perhaps."

"Let us pray for that." Rodney bowed for a moment of silent prayer, then hurried to his car again.

WHEN they arrived at Lonesome Pine Lodge, the nurse met them with excited apologies.

"I'm so sorry, sir. We received your message, but could not get the radio to work. The tubes or something—I know so little about these things. We tried and tried all evening, but no luck."

"Oh, yes—plenty of luck!" Rodney answered, hurrying to Maria's bedside.

She was asleep, her face calm and soft like a baby's, her hair falling about it in a golden frame upon the pillow.

As he kissed her tenderly, her eyes opened, and he saw them clear and bright with the loveliness of her returning sanity.

"Rodney—the music—it is leaving me. I only hear it faintly now. What was it, Rodney?" she asked like a frightened little girl.

"A song of hell that is no more," he answered softly, bending to kiss her trembling lips.

The Witch Walks in Her Garden

By LEA BODINE DRAKE

"I have spells to cast tomorrow," says the witch,
  Walking in her garden in the twilight gloom;
"There's to bog the Squire's sorrel,
 Brew for Meg a lover's quarrel
 'Twixt her Ned and Gipsy Kate,
 Curse two stiles and Bailie's gate;
  And I'll mend my riding-broom," says the witch.

"I must track my foe tomorrow," says the witch,
  Bowing to the moon arise above the Druid stones;
"Where he wanders I will follow;
 Loam that bears his footprint hollow
 I will lift with rune-carved shell,
 Toss it down a secret well;
 There he'll leap ere even-bell . . .
  He'll mock no more my old bones!" says the witch.

"I will change my skin tomorrow," says the witch,
  Peering in her pocket-glass, afrown at what it tells;
"There's a milkmaid young and fair
 Whom I'll catch in subtle snare,
 Hurl her silly soul to space,
 Don her form and wild-rose face . . .
 While a twelve-month circles by
 I'll be young and jimp and spry!
 Though a year be swiftly done,
 When the spell must break, and One
 Come at last to claim his own,
 I shall make no plea or moan!
 What care I? For one full year
 I'll have known sweet mirth and cheer;
  Then let me burn in all his hells!" says the witch.

"Cities were destroyed by flashes of fire in that war."

Fessenden's Worlds

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Like a young god, Fessenden created a miniature universe, but his unholy meddling with the lives and destinies of his creations brought about a startling catastrophe—an amazing weird-scientific story

I WISH now that I'd never seen Fessenden's damnable experiment! I wish my cursed curiosity had never taken me into his laboratory that night, to witness the thing that destroyed my peace of mind for ever and made me for the rest of my life a somber and soul-sick man.

Arnold Fessenden was the greatest scientist this planet ever produced—and the evilest. I *know!* I'd have told about it before, but I knew that I wouldn't be

believed. He assured me of that himself, grinning with sardonic mirth at me, that night he showed me what I'd like to forget.

It was a dark, wet, windy night in late October when I climbed the porch of Fessenden's big stone house near the campus, and rang the bell. He lived there quite alone now, I knew. Even his housekeeper had finally declared that she couldn't stand his queer ways any longer.

He came to the door himself. His big, powerful figure bulking against the dimly lit hall inside, he stared out at me and said, "Oh, it's you, Bradley. What do you want?"

I told him, "That's a poor way to receive guests. I just came over to gab a little — haven't seen you around the campus lately."

He hesitated a moment, then said, "I'm sorry, Bradley—I haven't had many guests of late. Come on in."

I went in and sat down in the slovenly-looking living-room. Fessenden sat in a chair and looked across at me with a queer mocking light in his piercing black eyes, and a sardonic smile on his flat, strong face.

I said, "Fessenden, why haven't you shown up at any of the faculty meetings lately? They tell me you've been letting a substitute take care of all your lecture courses, too."

Fessenden looked at me with that mocking smile and said, "What I like about you, Bradley, is that you're so transparent. You've heard everyone around the campus saying that I've got a little crazy, so you've come over to see for yourself."

"No, that's not so," I protested. "It's true that a good many people have been ridiculing those radical astrophysical theories you propounded, and that some of them think you're more than a little eccentric. But that means nothing to me. I know very well that whenever a man proposes something new, everyone at first thinks he's a little crazy."

I continued earnestly, "You know I'm only a foot soldier in the ranks of science myself—a poor devil of an instructor. Nevertheless, I've always recognized you as a great pioneer. I've been wondering a lot just what you've been working on here so intensively, and I'm honestly hoping you'll tell me something about it. But whether you do or not, you have my admiration and sympathy."

Fessenden's smile deepened. He told me, "Bradley, if you expect me to be grateful for your sympathy, you're wrong. I'm not. I have been called cold and unfeeling, and that is just what I want to be. The gabbling of the fools who have been ridiculing me does not disturb me, and means no more to me than does your sympathy."

My face must have fallen a little. Fessenden laughed.

"I'm glad that is clear to you," he said. "But now that it is, let me tell you that I have decided that I *will* show you what I am doing, after all. I'll show you the greatest experiment which any scientist on earth has ever conducted."

I said, in surprize, "If you feel no more friendliness for me than you say, I don't see why you should."

He shrugged mockingly. "Because, unfortunately, I am still an ordinary human being at bottom, Bradley. As such, I have a certain ineradicable amount of exhibitionism in me which, deplore it as I may, persists and makes me want to show at least somebody what I have done." He laughed. "Just like any small boy who has built his first kite and wants somebody to see it. I recognize the folly of this, I am amused by it, but I can't wholly eliminate it from my make-up.

"Well, why not indulge this irrational desire for applause by demonstrating to

you what I've done? You do not have enough intelligence to comprehend it all, of course. Still, you will be an auditor, an audience, and I shall satisfy this itch of mine to let someone know what I've accomplished."

I said quickly, "I promise that I'll keep everything you tell me absolutely confidential."

Fessenden roared with laughter. "You needn't promise that. For all I care, you can go out and tell the whole world what you see here. Only, if you do, they'll call you a madman and very likely confine you in an institution. By all means go ahead and tell them, if you want to."

He was still chuckling as he rose to his feet. "It's back in my laboratory, Bradley."

"But what is it, anyway?" I asked doubtfully. "What have you done?"

"I've created a universe," Fessenden told me.

I said impatiently, "That's a grandiose metaphor, but just what does it mean?"

"It's not a metaphor at all," Fessenden said blandly. "I mean literally that I have created a universe in my laboratory, a universe that has millions of suns, tens of millions of worlds."

I was silent. I was trying to avoid his eyes, to hide my disappointment from him.

Fessenden chuckled. "A minute ago," he said, "you were condemning the rest of the university for thinking me insane. Now you're thinking exactly the same thing, aren't you?—wondering how you can get out of this crazy Fessenden's house with good grace?"

He added, grinning sardonically, "Come along to the laboratory, Bradley, and see for yourself."

I followed his tall, powerful figure along the corridor. I did think now that his isolation and the ridicule his radical theories had evoked must have touched his mind. But still he must have something to show me, and I was eager to see what it was.

The laboratory was a long, stone-walled room whose walls were crowded with shelves of chemical and physical apparatus, and whose corners held great electrical mechanisms. Much of the equipment I saw was strange to my eyes. Then my gaze fastened on the thing at the center of the laboratory.

It consisted of two twelve-foot metal disks with grid-like surfaces, one on the floor and one on the ceiling directly over the other. They were connected by cables to the electrical machinery, and their grid-like surfaces shone faintly with wan blue light or force.

Between the two disks, floating unsupported in the air, hung a cloud of tiny sparks of light. It looked like a swarm of minute golden bees, countless in number, and the swarm was lenticular in shape. Mounted near this weird thing were several instruments that looked a little like telescopes, though unfamiliar in design. They seemed to be trained upon that thick little cloud of shining sparks.

Fessenden walked over to the thing and motioned calmly toward the blue-glowing disks in floor and ceiling. "These disks, Bradley, neutralize all the ordinary gravitational forces of earth in the space between them."

"What?" I cried, astonished. I stepped forward, was about to thrust my hand between the two disks to test the assertion. But Fessenden held me back.

"Don't try that," he warned. "The human body is accustomed to earth's gravitation, and is inwardly braced against it. If you were to step between those disks, out of earth's gravitation, your body would explode from its own inward pressure, just as a deep-sea fish

will explode when it is suddenly brought up from the tremendous pressures of its usual depths to the surface."

Fessenden added, gesturing to the floating swarm of sparks between the disks, "It was necessary that this should be outside earth's gravitational influences. For this is the universe I have created."

I stared from him to the shining swarm, and then back again to his dark, amused face. "Those little flecks of light —a universe?"

"Just that," he assured me. "Look closer at them, Bradley."

I looked closer, and I felt a weird chill creeping over me. Those points of light were so infinitesimal that I could barely distinguish them one from another, and I knew there must be millions of them in this thick swarm. Yet there were some oddly familiar features about them.

Some of the tiny sparks were blazing white in color, others smoky red, others golden yellow. The colors of suns in our own universe! Some of them were in double or triple groups, and here and there were clusters of them that contained thousands. And here and there, too, were little glowing patches that looked like tiny nebulæ, and crawling sparks with tails of light like Lilliputian comets, just as the floating sparks looked like tiny suns.

Those sparks were tiny suns! I knew it, beyond doubt, even while my brain fought against the knowledge and called it impossible. I knew that I was looking at a miniature universe, one on a scale many billions of times smaller than our own universe, yet one that was comparatively as large in extent as our own. A little microcosm, floating here in Fessenden's laboratory.

FESSENDEN'S eyes had been following my stupefied change of expression. He said calmly, "Yes, Bradley, it is true. That is a tiny, self-sustaining universe, with its own suns, nebulæ and worlds. Everything in it, down to the atoms which compose it, is infinitely smaller in scale than our own. But it is a real universe, like our own."

"And you say you created this?" I gasped.

Fessenden nodded. "Yes, I did. After many failures, I succeeded in bringing that universe into being only a few weeks ago. I have been experimenting with it ever since."

His black eyes flashed a little. "Didn't I tell you that it was the greatest experiment any scientist had ever conducted? Think of what I am able to do—I can conduct my astrophysical and other experiments on a *cosmic* scale. I can change or destroy suns and nebulæ at will, with the instruments I devised, can observe the minutest details of that tiny universe through my super-magnifying telescopes. I can make observations with a universe itself as my subject."

I said in amazement, "But how did you make it—start it?"

Fessenden shrugged. "How did our own universe start, Bradley? As a vast cloud of glowing gas that filled all space. The mutual attraction of the cloud's particles drew them together, so that the cloud condensed into huge nebulæ. The nebulæ further condensed into suns, which by tidal attraction and occasional collision, threw off matter that formed into circling worlds.

"Well, I started this tiny universe just like that. I filled the non-gravitational space between these disks with a cloud of glowing gas, whose atoms were infinitely tinier than our atoms because I had contracted their electronic orbits. Then all I had to do was watch while the same inevitable natural process that eons ago formed our universe, formed this little microcosm.

"I watched as the gas condensed into tiny nebulæ. I saw those little nebulæ condense further into miniature suns, just as in our own cosmos long ago. And I saw those suns, as their random wanderings brought them close to one another, throw off worlds.

"Millions on millions of tiny worlds, here in this little microcosm, Bradley! Worlds that I can change and tamper with and destroy at will, worlds with every conceivable kind of conditions, worlds whose life I can develop or wither as I wish. That is my experiment, Bradley!"

" 'Whose *life,'* you say?" I repeated in a whisper. "On the tiny planets of this microcosm—life?"

"Of course," said Fessenden. "Life always develops automatically on worlds where conditions are favorable, and usually in very much the same forms." He reached toward one of the bulky, unfamiliar telescopic instruments. "Wait, and I shall find such a world for you, Bradley. I shall let you watch its life develop, for yourself."

He applied his eye to one of the lenses of the bulky telescope-instrument, focusing it upon that shining cloud of sparks; turning knobs, twisting, searching—until at last he straightened.

"Now look, Bradley."

I put my eye to one of the lenses, looked into that cloud of floating sparks. There leaped into my vision, dazzling and gigantic, a huge white sun booming majestically through the darkness of space. Just one of those tiny sparks, seen through the super-magnifying instrument!

Fessenden was beside me, gazing through the other lens of the instrument. His fingers were touching the focus knobs and he said calmly, "Keep watching. You'll see the changes of ages in a few minutes of our time. For, of course, the time of this microcosm runs at an infinitely swifter rate than the time of our vaster universe."

As he shifted the focus of the instrument, my gaze seemed to leap toward that great sun. I made out two planets that circled it, at tremendous speed. A year of their time no more than a moment of ours!

One of these planets was still partly molten, but the other was cooling, its vapor-envelope condensing. My vision leaped forward, in the telescope, until I seemed almost standing on that cooling world. It was a wild, rocky planet, rain falling heavily on its surface from the cloudy sky, water collecting with unbelievable swiftness in seas.

Green life came into being on that worlds, first along the shores of the warm, shallow seas, then creeping out and advancing over the land. Swiftly vegetation mantled the globe. And now crawling animal life made its appearance as the ages ticked swiftly by.

The animal life developed quickly. So rapid were the changes that my gaze could hardly follow them. Warring species of unhuman monsters passed and vanished. Tiny hordes of man-like animals began to throng here and there, to multiply with each passing moment.

I saw rude villages of huts spring up on that world. The villages quickly became cities as that people developed in intelligence, age after microcosmic age. The cities towered higher each moment, great ships sailed upon the seas, ages of progress and development were run through before my eyes in tiny moments.

I was shaking as I recoiled from the telescope. I cried, "This is all impossible —it can't be real——"

Fessenden smiled. "Your expressions of stupefaction satisfy my egotistic desire for applause, Bradley. But I assure you that that tiny race and their world are

quite real." He chuckled. "No doubt that little folk think that they have reached such a pinnacle of power and knowledge that nothing can threaten them. We shall see now whether or not they are able to face a real danger."

He turned to a curious needle-like instrument and carefully trained it upon that part of the microcosm which held the tiny white spark that was the great sun of the world I had been watching.

There was a tiny comet crawling through the swarm, some distance from that white sun. Fessenden touched a knob, and from the needle-like instrument a thin, almost invisible filament of force crept into the microcosmic swarm of sparks and touched the little crawling comet. It seemed to veer a tiny bit aside.

"Now watch," said Fessenden with amused interest, "and we shall see just how great is the power of that little people."

I did not understand, but I looked again with him through the telescope at the tiny world. By now, so swift its development in terms of our time, its cities had become even vaster and were roofed with glass-like shields. Huge aircraft flashed above them.

All seemed peace and progress on that world. Generation after generation ticked by as we watched. Then came a mad stir of movement, a wild scurrying about of the little folk, a swift change in the tempo of their life. A faint green light was now falling upon their planet, the baleful glow of a monster comet that was coming headlong toward it.

I knew then that it was the tiny microcosmic comet whose course Fessenden had slightly altered. But in the telescope it was colossal, a huge orb dripping green light across the heavens as it rushed toward that world. Remorselessly it came on.

Then that comet struck the planet, and I saw the doom of the little folk's cities. The meteors that were the comet's only solid substance shattered the glass-roofed cities to ruin. The poisonous gases that made up the rest of the comet veiled that whole world in a toxic cloud.

The comet passed on as we watched, but its deadly gases had wiped away all life from that planet. It was still and brown and dead, now, a lifeless world circling its sun. The ruined cities melted swiftly down into decay and disappeared as we watched.

Fessenden's laugh rang in my ears as I stared in stunned horror. "You see—their knowledge was not enough to save them from the mere slight shifting of the comet's course."

"You killed them—killed every soul on that world!" My voice throbbed with the horror that I felt.

"Nonsense! It was just an experiment," Fessenden said. "It's no more murder than when a bacteriologist casually destroys germs he experiments with. Those little folk were millions of times smaller than any germ. But they and others like them on the countless worlds of this microcosm provide me with a subject for experimentation which no scientist has ever had before. Look at another world—here are two that interest me."

My vision in the telescope leaped to another sun, for Fessenden had shifted the focus. It was a yellow sun with four planets circling it. Two of them were airless worlds, but the other two bore different forms of life, one of them quite man-like, the other verging on the reptilian, each supreme on its own world. Both races had a certain amount of civilization, as was evident from the queer cities on their worlds. There was no contact or communication between them, for the two planets were widely separated from each other.

"Now I wonder," Fessenden was saying interestedly, "just what the result would be if those two races were to come into contact with each other. Well, we'll soon see," he mused aloud, and reached again toward the needle-like instrument.

Again a ghostly little thread of force stole into the microcosm. I saw its effects, through the telescope. One of those planets, beneath the impetus, began to change its orbit. It moved closer and closer toward the other inhabited world. Soon the two were so close together that they had formed an earth-moon system, revolving around a common center of gravity as they circled their sun.

Soon, very soon, ships began to fly from one world to the other across the narrowed gulf. Communication had been established. And almost at once came war between the two worlds, a conflict of the man-like and reptilian races. Cities were destroyed by flashes of fire in that war, great throngs went to death in battles of incredible ferocity. The tide turned in favor of the reptilian race. Their invading hordes destroyed the last members of the man-like folk. Then it was all over. The reptilian race reigned supreme over both worlds.

"I'm a little surprized—I thought the human race would have won out," Fessenden said interestedly. "Apparently they didn't have the adaptability of the reptilian race."

I cried, "That little human people would have lived for generations in peace and happiness if you hadn't brought that other world into contact with their own! Why didn't you let them alone?"

He said impatiently, "Don't be a fool, Bradley. This is just a scientific experiment—those ephemeral litle races and their tiny worlds are merely a subject for study." And he added, "Why, for days I've been observing and changing and tampering with these microcosmic worlds, just to see the reactions of their peoples to different stimuli and dangers. I've learned things from them that you'd never dream. Watch—I'll show you others."

In a stupefied trance I watched as Fessenden went on, taking my vision to world after world, prodding and changing, observing the fall of empires and the crash of planets with keen, amused detachment. I saw worlds of beauty incredible and worlds of horror unthinkable—planet after planet, race after race, and all of them merely the playthings of the experimenting scientist beside me.

Fessenden showed me a planet in the microcosm that was covered with wild forest in which dwelt little communities of hunting folk who chased the beasts of the forest. Generation after generation flashed by without change in their rude society—they were content to hunt and eat and love and die, without developing any higher civilization.

Then Fessenden turned upon that little world a tiny ray that altered its chemical stability. Beneath the influence of chemical changes, the plant life of that world began to unfold in weird hypertrophy, began to develop mobility, to change into great, rootless plant-things that soon fell upon and killed the animals. The communities of hunters battled valiantly for a few generations against the moving plant hordes, but in the end they all succumbed, and that world was covered only with restlessly moving plant life.

And Fessenden brought into our observation another world, planet of a sun out near the microcosm's edge. It was a watery world, covered with oceans over all of its surface. And teeming life had developed in that planetary sea, into intelligent, seal-like people who had reared

in the sea great submarine cities whose spires lifted here and there above the waters.

Fessenden's filaments of force played upon that world, and the seas began to dwindle, the water molecules to fly off into space. And as the seas rapidly shrank, for generation after generation, more and more of that world became dry land and the seal-people had to desert many of their cities and retreat back with the waters.

Very soon, as we watched, there was but one shallow sea remaining on that little world. And here were crowded the last of the seal-folk, and here they fought blindly with all manner of scientific devices to prevent the evaporation of this last refuge. But the remorseless process that Fessenden had started went on, and that last sea dried and disappeared also, and there was only a desert planet with the ruined wrecks of the dead seal-folk's cities standing here and there as memorials of the vanished race.

World after world my dazed eyes watched. I saw an icy planet that swung far out from its parent sun, and upon which was strange life adapted to the cold, bloodless little folk who had reared also a mighty civilization. Their weird palaces and cities rose amid the awful chasms of eternal ice, and it was evident that they were far advanced in scientific power.

Fessenden reached and touched their sun with a tiny thread of force. And that sun blazed suddenly hotter and brighter, casting forth a quadrupled radiance. Its increased heat began to melt the ice-sheath of that far-swinging little world, and its people began to perish from the unaccustomed warmth.

We saw them frantically laboring for the next generation at a great work upon the side of their little world. Then its purpose became clear to us, for from that spot there projected a plume of fire and force whose rocket-like push moved their little planet suddenly outward. They were moving their world farther from their sun to escape the increased warmth, and at a suitable distance they let it settle into a new orbit where it was as cold as before. And Fessenden laughed and applauded their ingenuity.

And there was a world whose crowded peoples were ruled by an oligarchy of living brains. Time after time, each generation that passed, we saw the enslaved people revolt against the tyranny of the brains, and each time the weapons of their unhuman masters subdued them.

Fessenden's probing threads of force reached deep into the bowels of that little planet, and it rocked with terrific quakes that threw up vast masses of radioactive material from the interior. And a strange glowing plague seized the bodies of the people and also seized the brains, so that they began to rot and die.

Swiftly the people were annihilated by that glowing rot, but the brains managed to contrive for themselves an antidote against the deadly infections, so that most of the brains survived. For a few generations the brains clung to existence, served now by machines of their own devising. But they must have made their mechanical servants too intelligent, for in time the machines rose against the brains and destroyed them. And later still, without any directing intelligence, the machines themselves came to wreck and vanished from that world.

Dazed with horror, I watched as we viewed world after world of the microcosm, as Fessenden probed and changed and destroyed. And then there came into my view a world whose aching beauty brought tears to my eyes, a green and blossoming world whose people were human, but of a fineness and beauty far beyond our own humanity.

Not upon their world were any towering cities or huge machines or swarming vehicles. Their civilization had reached a plane above crude material progress, and their planet was like a green and surpassingly lovely park. Here and there amid the flowering trees shimmered exquisite buildings, and through flowers and forests went white-robed noble men and beautiful women. And their knowledge had almost conquered death, since for many microcosmic generations they remained unchanged.

I WATCHED that world through the telescope with my heart struck at the vision, and in the peace and loveliness of that planet and its people I seemed to catch a glimpse of what humanity might aspire to in some unthinkably far future. And then I suddenly woke to the fact that Fessenden, beside me, was reaching again toward the needle-like instrument that loosed his tampering forces upon the microcosmic worlds.

I broke then from my trance and cried out, horrified, "Fessenden, you can't do anything to endanger *that* world!"

He smiled sardonically. "Of course I'm going to do something. I want to see whether that people have not become decadent in their peace and plenty—whether the science that brought them up to that level can save them now when real danger threatens."

He chuckled as he sighted the needle-like thing. "A mere tiny thread of force—but it will cause their little sun to spin so fast that it will break up. Will that people have the resourcefulness to save themselves by flight to another sun? We shall soon see."

But I tore him away from the deadly instrument and sent him staggering back across the laboratory with a wild thrust.

"No!" I cried. "These worlds and peoples that you experiment with and endanger and destroy—they're real! As real as ours, even though infinitely smaller. I'll not let you calmly vivisect and torment any more of them, out of your damnable scientific curiosity."

Fessenden's black brows drew together in a cold fury and he rasped, "I see now how foolish it was to show my experiment to an unreasoning sentimentalist like you. But that microcosm is *my* experiment, *my* property, and I'll experiment with and destroy every world in it, if I please. Get away from that instrument."

"I won't do it!" I shouted. "You've wreaked horror enough on those tiny planets with your inhuman experiments, subjecting those little races to agony and toil and death just to gratify your unholy curiosity. You're not going to do it now with this little world!"

Fessenden sprang straight at me, rage burning in his black eyes. His heavy fist descended on me and knocked me away from the instrument I held.

I reeled back from that blow. And at that moment I heard a hoarse cry. Fessenden had tripped on one of the cables in his wild spring, and was toppling into the space between the two disks.

His toppling body struck the microcosm squarely and it crashed around him in a broken shower of sparks. A universe wrecked in a second. At the same time, Fessenden's body exploded—it exploded into a bloated, torn thing of flesh, just as he had warned me any human body would do if it entered the area between the disks where there was no gravitation.

The cable he had tripped over had jerked loose—and there was a flash of fire across the lower disk. In an instant, destroying blue electrical flames enveloped the disks and Fessenden's body, and danced around the electrical machinery in the laboratory with a sputtering, increasing roar.

I turned and stumbled crazily out of the laboratory, out of the house into the wet and windy night. I heard a crackling roar behind me and the flickering light of the now flaming house shot past me as I staggered on, but I did not look back. . . .

SO ENDED Fessenden and his great experiment. No one doubted but that the eccentric scientist had somehow set fire to the house and had perished in the blaze, and I said nothing to change that opinion. And very soon his end was no longer remembered, and Fessenden is now forgotten by everyone. By everyone, except me.

I wish that I could forget too! But I can't forget Fessenden and his microcosmic worlds, and because I can't, my soul is sick and I have a shuddering, fearful wonder in me that will endure until I die, a black question to which I'll never get an answer, and which torments me every time I look up at the night stars.

And the question that quakes in my soul whenever I look up into the starry sky is this—is our own great universe nothing but a tiny microcosm, on some vaster scale? And in that vaster cosmos, is there a super-experimenter who regards our universe as nothing but an interesting experiment, and who smites us with disasters just to study our reactions for his own amusement? Is there a Fessenden up *there?*

The Execution of Lucarno

By JULIUS LONG

A story of fear—stark, staring fear—and yawning, abysmal gulfs of horror

HE WAS a very ordinary-looking young man of less than thirty. He might have been an office supply salesman or perhaps a bright young lobbyist come to bother the Governor with some sly request. He did not tell me his name but simply handed me his card.

I read: "Paul Barrett, M. D. Drexel Building."

"What can I do for you, Doctor Barrett?" I asked, tossing the card onto my table. It landed beside Dan Moultrie's feet cocked there.

"I wish to see Governor Mitchell."

"Have you an appointment?"

Being Governor Mitchell's secretary, I knew he hadn't.

"No."

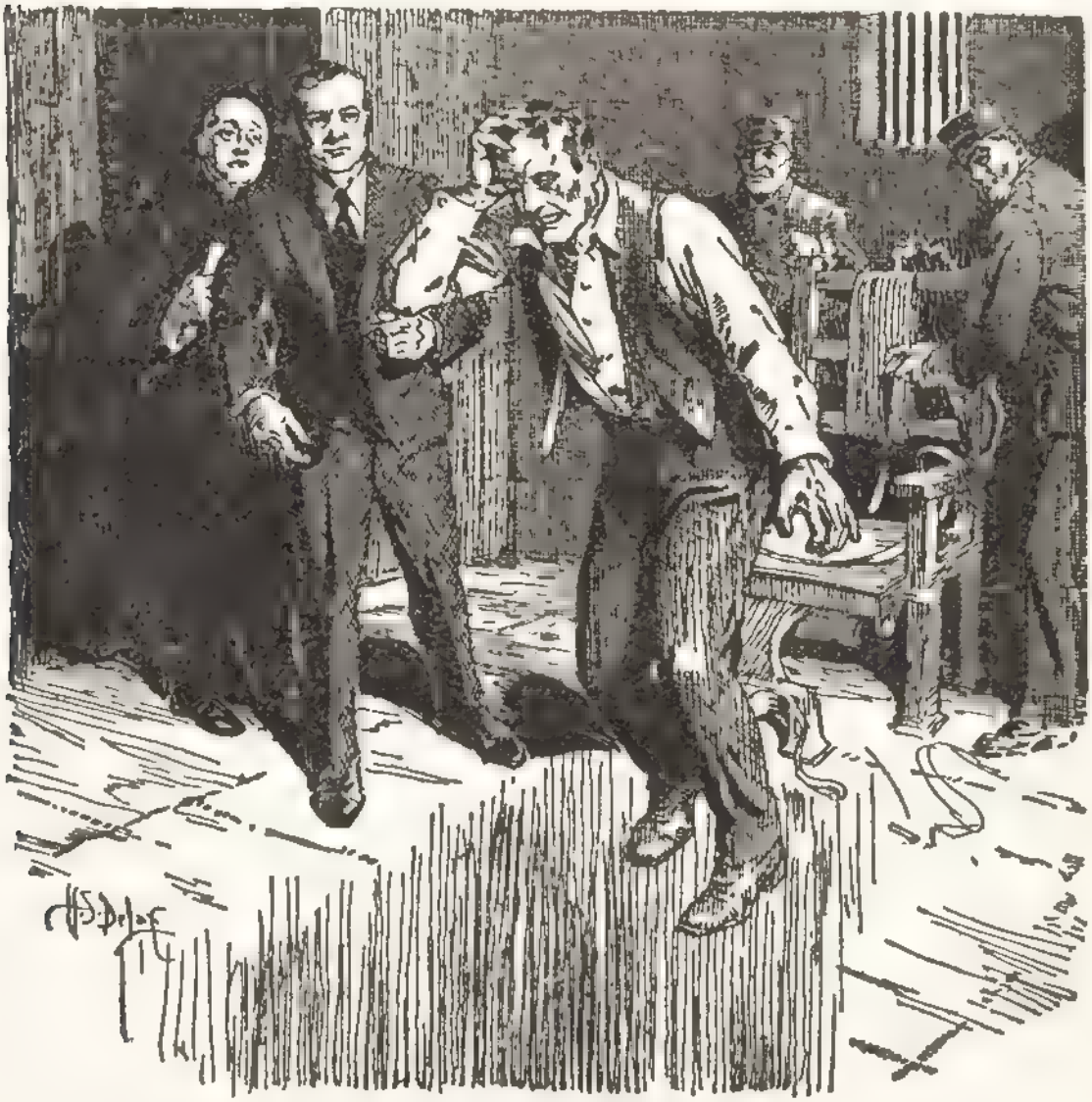
"In that case, I'm afraid it's impossible for you to see him today. What did you want to see him about?"

"I want to see him about Hugo Lucarno."

I heard the creak of a chair and saw that Dan Moultrie was straightening up and eyeing the caller with interest. Moultrie was Lucarno's attorney and the best criminal lawyer in the state. He had a thin fox-like face and quick little eyes. He once told me that he'd always wanted to be a corporation lawyer but he didn't have any chance with a face like his. He'd been haunting the Governor's office for days trying to get a reprieve for Lucarno. Lucarno was the first client he'd ever had to be sentenced to the chair, and he was moving heaven and earth to keep his record clean.

"Why do you want to see the Governor about Lucarno?" I asked. "I hope you aren't one of those people who had a dream that convinced them he was innocent. Or maybe you want to pull the switch that electrocutes him tonight?"

"Yeah," said Moultrie, adjusting his



"A figure of terror, he tottered as on the brink of an abyss."

tie. "What have you got to say about Lucarno? I'm his lawyer. If you've got anything I want to know what it is."

Doctor Barrett eyed us both coldly.

"I am not concerned with the guilt or innocence of Lucarno. I am concerned only with a scientific experiment. If Governor Mitchell will permit me to make that experiment with Lucarno, I believe I can demonstrate the most startling discovery in the history of the science of psychology."

I exchanged glances with Moultrie, who didn't bat an eye.

"What have you got?" he asked. "Some kind of a new lie detector?"

Doctor Barrett eyed him scornfully.

"No. As for the nature of my experiment, I can discuss that only with Governor Mitchell."

"I'm afraid you can't," I said. "The Governor happens to be a very busy man. I can't let you see him until I know whether he'd want to listen to what you've got to say."

Doctor Barrett looked at me with tilted brows and made a grimace with one side of his face.

"Very well. But I must speak with you privately."

"Listen," said Moultrie, "if you've got anything to say that concerns Lucarno, I'm in on it, see?"

"You can speak freely before Mr. Moultrie," I said quickly. "I'm sure that in any event Governor Mitchell wouldn't want to act without first advising Lucarno's attorney."

DOCTOR BARRETT eyed Moultrie doubtfully, made another one-sided face and began to unfold his strange request.

"For a period of years," he said, "I have made a study of the psychology of fear. Of all the emotions, it is the most powerful. Its power, I believe, has never been more than superficially explored. In my study of it, I have been principally concerned with the fear of falling, which is beyond question the most primitive of all the fears to which the human race is susceptible. This, of course, is because our ancestors were arboreal, and the fear of falling from the limbs of the trees in which they dwelt was the most deeply rooted fear in their minds. It is significant that human infants react to only two fear stimuli, loud noises and the loss of support. Both stimuli induce a fear of falling, the former because the loud noise is associated with the cracking of breaking limbs."

I shot a quick glance at Moultrie. He was all ears. I decided that if he could give the doctor his attention, so could I.

"Perhaps," Doctor Barrett continued, eyeing us appraisingly, "you wonder why I have preoccupied myself with this fear of falling. My motive dates back to my first year of medical practise, four years ago. It was then that a strange accident occurred. An employee in the building in which I had my office fell down a freight elevator shaft when the safety device failed and allowed a door to open on the twentieth floor. The elevator car was stopped at the eighteenth floor, and its top was on a level with the nineteenth floor. The workman, then, fell only a single floor. Do you understand?"

I nodded. I might have said that I failed to understand how a workman falling through an elevator shaft could possibly concern Hugo Lucarno.

"The workman was killed," Doctor Barrett went on. "There was nothing intrinsically strange about that. Many men are killed by falls of less distance. The strange thing was that the workman was as badly crushed and mangled as if he had fallen the whole depth of the elevator shaft.

"The skull was crushed, the back was

broken in several places, and there were compound fractures of both arms and legs. The muscles were horribly torn and lacerated, and the body was unrecognizable. I was the first physician called, and I refused to believe that he had fallen but a single story. The testimony of the several witnesses, however, convinced me that I was confronted with a distinct and thought-provoking phenomenon.

"The coroner dismissed the case as an ordinary accidental death. I think he knew there was nothing ordinary about it, but he didn't want to bother. I couldn't get the incident out of my mind. I pondered over it for days. Why, I asked myself time and again, was the body of that workman so horribly crushed?

"The phenomenon could not be explained by the simple reasoning that the effect of a fall depends largely on the angle or place of impact of the body. It is a commonplace, of course, that men may fall five or six stories and live to tell about it. It is also a common occurrence for people to slip on wet pavement and kill themselves. It depends on whether a vital spot takes the jolt. But to believe that a man who fell a single story down an elevator shaft could have been so horribly crushed and mutilated simply because of the manner in which he fell seemed out of the question. I decided that there must be some other explanation to that phenomenon.

"It occurred to me that when the workman fell down that pitch-dark elevator shaft he must have thought he was falling clear to the bottom. I wondered if the state of his mind could have had any causal relation to the effects of his fall. Could it be possible that he had suffered the effects of a twenty-story fall simply because he *feared* he was falling twenty stories down that black hole of the elevator shaft?

"The more I considered such a possibility, the more I became fascinated by it. From idle conjecture it became an obsession. I began to seek a means of proving it.

"At length it occurred to me that interesting results might be obtained if I could create an optical illusion of great altitude. Would this optical illusion, I asked myself, cause a falling animal to suffer injuries entirely out of proportion to the distance it actually fell? Would its fear of the consequences produce the very consequences it feared? Would the psychological effect be so great that the body of the animal would lack its normal resistance to the impact? I resolved to make such an experiment.

"My initial difficulty lay in the creation of the optical illusion. Little is known of the chemistry of the optical nerves. I began a long series of experiments with compounds containing atropin, which affects only the parasympathetic nerves, and nicotine, which influences only the spinal sympathetic system. I experimented with myself, for I could not check the effects of drugs on animals except by external observation. My confidence in my hypothesis was so great that before taking these drugs I strapped myself to a pillar. I was convinced that if I succeeded in obtaining the illusion of great altitude I should become dizzy and fall. I expected no ordinary consequences from such a fall.

"At last I hit upon a formula which perfectly produced the illusion I sought. Strapped to a pillar, I found myself staring thousands of feet downward. The illusion was so perfect that despite my knowledge that I was safely strapped, I received such a fright that I was too weak to work for days. Upon my recovery I began to experiment with animals. The drug affected the guinea-pigs and cats and dogs and monkeys that I administered it

to. I could assure myself of this from the terrified stare they fixed on the ground beneath them. Invariably they became dizzy and toppled over. And quite as invariably they shook themselves and walked away without injury.

"After months of failure, I had almost decided that my hypothesis was merely a wild flight of the imagination. Then it occurred to me that my failures might be ascribed to the kind of subjects I used in my experiments. I reflected that animals do not possess a consciousness at all comparable with that of human beings. It is a consciousness that is more instinctive than rational. Restricted by powerful instincts, it is less imaginative and less suggestible. My mistake lay in trying to explore the consciousness of human beings with the consciousness of animals. I might never hope to demonstrate the power of mind over matter with mind that was inferior to matter. In short, I could not conduct my experiments without human subjects.

"It seemed that I had reached a permanent impasse. If my experiment proved successful, the subject would die a horrible death. I had no doubt, of course, that there were plenty of skeptics quite willing to undergo the test. My hypothesis would seem so fantastic that no one would believe that he actually risked his life or even injury in acting as a subject of such an experiment. But I could not ask anyone to take such a risk, regardless of his willingness. I am not one of those cold-blooded scientists who will sacrifice human lives to prove an abstract theory. I am first a human being. Being human, I did not care, of course, to submit myself to the experiment. What then, was I to do?"

"I think I can answer that," said Moultrie. "You figured that Hugo Lucarno was going to die anyway, so it wouldn't make any difference what happened to him."

Doctor Barrett nodded.

"When I read about Lucarno in the paper this morning, I saw that I had the solution to my problem. Lucarno is a doomed man. He has nothing to lose. If the experiment is a failure, he will go to the chair as scheduled. If it proves a success, Lucarno will merely be paying his debt to society. Do you understand?"

I thought I did. I was face-to-face with a crack-brained scientist who wanted to waste Governor Mitchell's time with a fantastic request.

"There is only one thing the matter with your idea," said Moultrie sourly. "Lucarno isn't going to die in the chair tonight, or any other night. No client of mine has ever died in the chair, and none ever will. You can count on that."

"I'm afraid that stops you," I told Doctor Barrett, glad to be able to pass the responsibility. "Even if the Governor decided to let you try your experiment on Lucarno, he couldn't do such a thing without Lucarno's consent, and that means the consent of his lawyer."

"But," protested Doctor Barrett, "couldn't Governor Mitchell give me the authority anyway? I didn't imagine Lucarno would object. He seems to be a sort of devil-may-care fellow. The paper quoted him as saying that he was going to the chair unassisted, with a cigarette in his mouth and a smile on his lips. I believe that kind of fellow would submit voluntarily, as a sort of a lark. If the Governor would only ask him to do it, he wouldn't be depriving him of his rights."

I shook my head.

"The whole idea's out," I said. "The Governor would probably fire me if I even suggested it. As for his acting regardless of the wishes of Lucarno, he can't do it. Even a condemned murderer

has certain rights. Among them is the right to die in the manner prescribed by law. You probably think that isn't much of a right, but I imagine that if you were in Lucarno's shoes, you'd change your mind."

"Then you won't even let me see the Governor?"

"No."

Doctor Barrett made that funny little one-sided face again, but didn't lose his temper. Aside from his crack-brained idea about falls, he seemed to be a pretty sensible fellow.

"In that case, I won't take any more of your time. Thank you for the time you've given me."

He turned on his heel and walked out. Dan Moultrie watched him go. Then he reached over and picked up the card Doctor Barrett had given me. He read it intently and tossed it aside.

"I wonder," he said musingly, "if that doc's got something."

"Just a crazy idea," I said.

"Maybe. And maybe not."

"I hope," I said, "you don't seriously believe that baloney you gave him about Lucarno's not going to the chair. That boy's going to fry tonight per schedule at eight o'clock, and you know it."

Moultrie breathed a long sigh.

"Yeah, it kinda looks like my shut-out record is ended. It looks like I'm licked. But maybe something will break for me before eight o'clock."

"You talk as if you were going to the chair instead of Lucarno."

"I'd about as soon," Moultrie said in a way that made me believe he meant it. "Maybe you don't know it, but I think I'm serving humanity by keeping murderers out of the chair. Yes, even a rat like Lucarno. Did you ever see a guy fry?"

I shook my head.

"Well, you ought to. Maybe you'd see why I think I'm not doing anything unethical by cheating the chair. Some day the Bar Association will stop denouncing me and unveil a monument to my memory."

"I'd like to see that," I said.

"You will, boy, you will."

Moultrie got out of his chair and moved toward the door.

"I'm not doing any good loafing around here," he said. "I'm going out and try to think. Maybe I'll get an idea."

I WATCHED his frail figure disappear beyond the door. Then a buzzing sound made me move. Governor Mitchell was buzzing for me. He set me on an assignment that kept me busy all day. I didn't think anything more about Lucarno or Moultrie or Doctor Barrett until I bought a stock final at six o'clock. The Lucarno execution was big news. The news story hinted that Lucarno would get a reprieve, but I knew that was not true. The Governor had told me that morning that Lucarno was going to the chair regardless of anything Moultrie would try.

I finished reading the newspaper at the restaurant where I always dined. I was just getting ready to leave when Moultrie came back to my booth. It was seven o'clock then.

He sat down opposite me.

"I thought I'd find you here," he said.

"Well?"

"I'm going out to the state pen tonight," he said. "Lucarno's got to burn. I'm licked. I can't do anything to stop it. Mitchell's put the sign on me, and nothing I can do will change his mind. I've decided that I should be there when Lucarno takes his walk. I owe that much to him."

"Well?"

"I want you to go with me. I want you to see Lucarno when they pull the switch. Maybe you'll change your mind about a few things."

I stared at Moultrie, trying to figure him out. Why should he want to take me out to watch Lucarno die? Certainly he didn't care enough about my opinion to go to all this bother. He began to talk fast. Moultrie, when he wanted to be, was quite a talker. When he'd stopped talking, I'd agreed to go with him.

He drove out to the state prison in his low, fast convertible. It wasn't very far, for the state prison is on the edge of the downtown district. It was twenty minutes to eight when we arrived there. Moultrie had arranged for admittance, and we went right to the death house.

It was filled with newspaper men and officials. They sat on three benches facing the chair. I knew all of them, but felt so out of place in that gray room that it seemed to me I should be introduced all over again. It was fully five minutes before I could bring myself to look directly at the chair. I was surprized that I wasn't shocked by its appearance. It looked merely efficient.

At about ten minutes to eight, Moultrie left my side.

"I'm going to talk with Lucarno," he said. "Maybe I can say something to help."

A guard escorted him through a small door on the right. I sat there waiting, talking to the men around me but paying not the slightest attention to what anybody said. I felt hot inside and hoped I wouldn't get sick.

It was almost eight o'clock when Moultrie came back. He seemed nervous when he sat down beside me.

"It won't be long now," he said.

It wasn't.

The little door at the right opened, and a pair of guards stepped into the room. The warden followed, and then two more guards. Next was Lucarno.

He entered the death house precisely as he said he would, unassisted, with a cigarette in his mouth and a smile on his lips. It was a fresh cigarette, and had just been lighted. His collar was open at the throat, and he wore an unbuttoned vest. He looked as if he was on his way to answer a telephone that had interrupted a game of pool. Only a priest incongruously followed, along with another pair of guards.

"Hi, boys!" Lucarno said, his lips bobbing the cigarette around as he spoke.

Somebody coughed. Then there was absolute silence as Lucarno walked with a jaunty stride toward the chair. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that Moultrie was watching him intently, expectantly.

The guards who had first entered the room now stood on either side of the chair. The warden stepped to its left. With a smirk, Lucarno moved to the chair. He turned around and faced us, whose hearts beat like tom-toms as we watched. He drew a long last puff from his cigarette and flicked it away. The guards moved toward him. Then Lucarno did a strange thing.

Abruptly he clapped his hands to his eyes. He held them there a moment, looked dazedly about him.

"I can't see!" he said, in a strange high-pitched voice. "I'm blind!"

The guards stopped in their tracks and looked questioningly at the warden. Was this some trick? The warden made no movement. He watched the condemned man, who was now staring downward *through* the floor, rather than at it. From a look of puzzled wonder, his expression became one of terror. His features assumed the distortion of a gargoyle, and his eyes receded into his skull as they seemingly stared into an abysmal depth. A figure of terror, he tottered as if on the brink of an abyss. And then, uttering a strangled cry, he fell forward.

His body struck the cement floor of the

death house with a sound I shall never be able to forget. It was the sound of a body disintegrating into pulp. For Lucarno's skull became a flattened, spongy mass, and his body oozed through his ripped clothes.

How long the silence lasted, I do not know. Suddenly there broke out a pandemonium that roared in my ears. Newspaper men, yelling insanely, rushed to the narrow exit, collided there, struggled to press through. Presently, of the spectators, only Moultrie and I were left. I drew my eyes from the pulpy mass that had been Lucarno and looked at Moultrie. Chalk-white, he spoke to me in a low, almost inaudible voice.

"My God! Lucarno's as crushed as if he'd fallen a mile!"

"Did you see the way he stared?" I said. "He *thought* he was falling a mile. And the same thing happened to him that would have happened if he *had* fallen a mile! There's only one answer, Doctor Barrett."

Moultrie slowly nodded.

"I never dreamed," he mused more to himself than to me, "that such a thing could happen."

"What should we do?" I asked him. "Shouldn't we notify the police? This thing is murder!"

Moultrie's mind seemed to be working rapidly as he hesitated.

"Let's see Barrett first," he said. "We can call the police when we get there."

I stared quizzically into his little fox-like eyes.

"I think I see your point of view," I said. "You want to talk to Barrett before the police get there. You want to take his case. Is that it?"

"Maybe it is and maybe it isn't," he replied. "You might as well come along with me. There's nothing but chaos around this place, anyway, and I doubt if anyone would listen if we told what has happened. Come along. We'll have a talk with Barrett and see what he has to say."

For the second time that evening I let Moultrie persuade me against my better judgment. I accompanied him from the prison and got into his car. He drove rapidly, and in a very few minutes we were at the Drexel Building.

BEFORE Moultrie left his car he drew a medium-sized automatic from the dash compartment and dropped it into his pocket.

"I may need this," he said.

I made no comment. But I failed to understand why Moultrie would need a gun if he intended to defend Barrett.

"Maybe Barrett won't be in his office," I said, as we entered the foyer of the building.

"He will be."

Moultrie seemed to know exactly what he was doing. He went directly to a phone booth and called police headquarters. I listened outside while he told them to send a squad at once to Barrett's office. While he made the call I tried to figure out just what his game was. I couldn't do it. But I knew he was playing some kind of lone hand.

In the elevator I asked him a question which had been in my mind since the thing had happened to Lucarno.

"How do you suppose Barrett managed to give Lucarno the drug? I can't see how such a thing could be possible."

"You'll soon know all about that," Moultrie said.

We left the elevator at the twentieth floor, where Barrett's office was located. There was a light shining through the frosted glass door of his reception room. Moultrie grasped the knob and pushed

the door inward. We entered. Instantly an inner door opened, and Barrett stood there, eyeing us eagerly, expectantly.

"Well," he said excitedly to Moultrie, "what happened? Was the experiment successful?"

"Yes," said Moultrie. "The experiment was successful. Lucarno was mashed to a pulp because he thought he was falling a mile from the sky."

"I knew it!" Barrett exclaimed jubilantly. "I knew it! At last the power of fear has been demonstrated! It is the greatest discovery in the science of psychology. I wonder what these mechanistic psychologists will have to say about this!"

"I want to talk to you," Moultrie said, moving toward the inner door.

Barrett stepped aside. I followed. Moultrie closed the door behind him when he had entered Barrett's private office. I went directly to a water-cooler in one corner and drank two glasses of water. I felt better.

"Have a cigarette," said Moultrie, extending an opened case. "It will steady your nerves."

I took one and lighted it. When I had finished lighting it I saw that Doctor Barrett was staring quizzically at me. Then he turned and opened his mouth to question Moultrie. The words did not come, and as I followed the direction of his gaze, I saw why. Moultrie had the automatic in his hand, and he was aiming it directly at Barrett. Even as I saw the gun, Moultrie squeezed the trigger twice.

Barrett looked a little bewildered, then settled down on the floor. He coughed once or twice and lay still.

I stood there watching, puffing madly on my cigarette. Then I fairly shrieked at Moultrie.

"Why in the name of God did you do that?"

Moultrie removed his eyes from the motionless body. He lifted them slowly to my own.

"I had to," he said. "You see, I have a strong instinct of self-preservation. If Barrett had lived long enough to be arrested, he would have told the police that it was I who gave Lucarno a drugged cigarette before he walked to the chair and made the experiment possible."

"You!"

"Yes. It was my last card. I had to play it in a desperate effort to get the execution stayed. I went to Barrett after I left your office this morning and told him I would give Lucarno the drug. I told him that if Lucarno was killed, I could get him acquitted. Of course, I would be an accomplice in case Lucarno was killed, but I never dreamed he would be. I thought the drug would just make him dizzy and fall over. I hoped he'd break an arm or injure himself some other way so badly that the execution would have to be stayed. You're probably familiar with the state law that a man cannot be executed unless he is sound physically—permanent disabilities not counting, of course. I intended to invoke this law if anything happened to Lucarno. I could get the execution stayed, and that would give me more time to have the sentence commuted. But it turned out that Barrett's theory about fear was right, and Lucarno was killed. You see what a spot that put me in.

"I knew Barrett wouldn't keep his mouth shut. He'd want everyone to know what a great scientist he is. So I had to kill him. I had to do it sooner than I planned, because he was about to say that I had given you one of the cigarettes he had prepared for Lucarno. You see, I have to get rid of you, too. When the

police come I will tell them that Barrett gave you the cigarette and attacked me when I saw what happened to you. I had to shoot him in self-defense."

Moultrie's little eyes were fixed on the cigarette I held between my lips. In the excitement of Barrett's shooting, I had been puffing it madly. Now, as the truth came to me, I tore it from my mouth and flung it to the floor.

"It's too late," Moultrie said softly. "The drug is already in your system."

"You swine!" I shouted. I started for him, ignoring in my anger the gun in his hand.

Half-way toward him, I halted. Everything in the room faded abruptly into grayness. Then quite as quickly vision returned to me.

But what a vision! The floor of that office had become a wide, boundless plain, and its walls were beyond its horizon! I was suspended thousands of feet above it by some inexplicable means. The incredible part of it was that I actually believed this to be a fact! My terror was complete, overwhelming. It would not permit me to reflect for an instant that all was an optical illusion, that I stood safely on the floor of Doctor Barrett's office. The doctor, Moultrie, the events of the evening, all were blotted out of my consciousness. I was aware only of that horrible altitude at which I remained suspended in the air. My dizziness increased geometrically with my terror. I knew that I must fall. I had to fall. It was useless to try to retain my balance there in the sky. Vertigo was pulling me irresistibly downward. And when I fell . . . I recalled vaguely a shapeless form oozing from exploded garments upon a cement floor. That was the way I would be when I fell down there, thousands of feet below. I tottered now and tried in vain to right myself. I started that inevitable plunge forward.

But something clutched me above my knees, held me there in space. I righted myself, stood erect again. I heard a violent oath and then a blinding flash caused me involuntarily to close my eyes. I held them so tightly closed that they pained me almost unendurably as the support about my legs gave way. The horrible illusion of altitude left me, and I felt my feet firmly planted on the floor again. I must, I realized now, keep my eyes closed, or that illusion would return to me with vision.

Bony fingers were clawing at my face now, and I realized with horror that Moultrie was trying to pull my eyelids open! I struck out and landed a solid blow. I heard a body falling. I groped about blindly and presently felt a doorknob in my grasp. I opened a door, staggered from the room. Somewhere a siren was sounding. I kept on groping, striking the walls, but going blindly on.

I WAS in the corridor when the police officers found me. They held me while I dared to open my eyes. Normal vision had returned to me. I led them to Doctor Barrett's office.

Doctor Barrett lay on the floor of the room. He was not where I had last seen him, and I knew that it had been he who had gripped my legs and thus prevented my falling. A third bullet had ended his life. It was the firing of this bullet by Moultrie that had blinded me and caused my eyes to close.

It was the thing in the corner that drew the attention of the police. The mangled body of Moultrie gave mute testimony that the lawyer had given up his case as hopeless. His death was incomprehensible to the police officers, who failed to grasp the significance of the cigarette which was still clutched in his pulpy hand.

The Shuttered House

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

Ghostly and uncanny was the influence of the old house with the French shutters—a tale of shuddery fear

PETER JEPSON had made up his mind about it almost at first sight. The house was attractive, the dark green of shutters tightly closed over all its windows, and the vivid white of its brick walls lending an air of dubious enchantment to it. There was a wide piazza which could not be seen from the street because of the old red-brick garden wall; this Jepson could not help regarding as an asset, for he knew that Carlotta disliked being spied upon by curious villagers, and he himself did not care to be the focus of the certain attention which would fall to him once it was generally learned that he was a composer by profession.

Then, too, there was about the house a strangely silent air, broken only by vague chirps from the depths of the foliage, and suffused at this time of the year with the sweet, heavy odor of lilacs, a riot of lavender blossom at the foot of the garden. There were also a great many flowers growing wild in the lawn and amidst the garden's weeds, and the rambling trees and flowering shrubs seemed to have grown very well without care.

The agent spoke suddenly, breaking Jepson's scrutiny. "Old Josiah Brendon built the house," he said with the air of launching into a tale. "A miser—died counting his gold, they say. His wife was just as bad in another way—hated everybody, never went out; for that matter, there are women like her in Sac Prairie today. But their son, Mark, and his wife, Elva, were the worst. No doubt about that. I used to know Mark, too; nice fellow. I never did understand what got into him. But no one knows exactly what makes a madman.

"I remember when they took Elva away to the asylum, and when they brought her back for burial. I guess that was what finally upset Mark. Got him right. He lived here alone, then, and he used to come out at night and beat at the window-shutters and tear at the garden wall until his fingers bled. In the end, they had to take him away, too."

He stopped musingly, pursing his lips and narrowing his eyes reflectively, and added, "They brought him back alive, though—white-haired and looking terribly old. He didn't go back to this house—went to one of the hotels and took rooms there. Wouldn't go near this place. I saw him not long before he died last year and I got the agency."

"Interesting," commented Jepson shortly. "And no one has lived here since?"

"Well, ah, yes," murmured the agent apologetically. "A crusty bachelor lived here for about a week. You could hardly call that occupying the house. He got queer notions."

"Notions?" echoed Jepson absently.

Mr. Burcher nodded vigorously. "Had the idea there was someone trying to get into him. Never heard the like." He paused, adding thoughtfully, "I was glad to have him out of the house."

Jepson eyed the French windows and

the weed-grown garden and the high brick wall shutting out the street. He smiled to himself. "Good," he said. "I'll take the house for the summer, at least."

Burcher smiled enthusiastically. "Will there be just you, Mr. Jepson?" he asked.

"Oh, no. My invalid sister will move in with me," Jepson replied. "And of course, there'll be a cook, a maid, and a nurse for Carlotta."

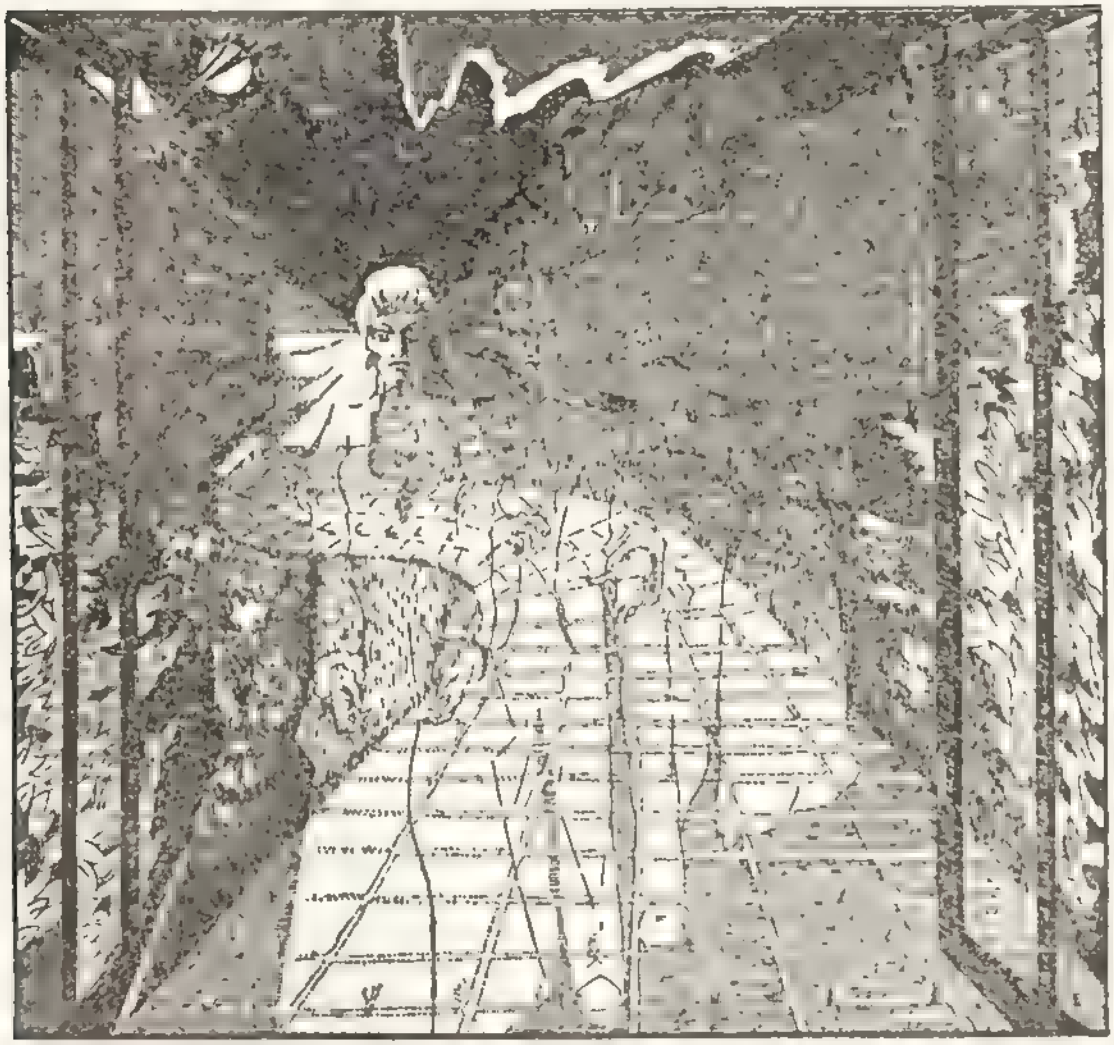
Together they went from the house.

PETER JEPSON and his sister moved into the house on the first of June.

Miss Carlotta, an angular and unpre-possessing woman who had spent a decade coddling her nerves, had at first been pleased with her brother's selection. However, he had not been so sanguine as to hope that she would long be content, though he had not thought she would complain so soon. After a day in the house, she pointed out that it felt rather damp. He brushed this suggestion firmly away.

"And then, too, Peter," she went on, "the air's funny in the house."

This he chose to disregard entirely. He was at the moment deep in the score of Leo Sowerby's *Prairie*, and his enthu-



"They come stiffly on, their faces expressionless and cold."

siasm for it had been rapidly mounting. "This is a great work, Carlotta," he said in an attempt to divert her mind from complaint. "The critics can say all they want about the scarcity of really good Midwest composers, but I tell you that Sowerby——" Happening to look up at this moment, he discovered his sister staring through the French windows of his study into the garden.

At the same moment she caught his glance, and without a flicker of her eyes, she whispered harshly, "There's a strange man out there!"

Startled, he turned. The afternoon was cloudy with a hint of rain, and the garden, still in the motionless air of the sultry day, was heavily shadowed by the close-pressing clouds and the low-hanging trees. Near the lilac bushes at the far end there seemed indeed to be a figure, that of a rather bent man of medium size, who was apparently engaged in work at the base of the wall. Jepson was about to comment, when the clouds broke, sunlight flooded the garden, and the figure was gone.

He was surprized. "How strange!" he murmured presently. He had an unaccountable feeling of relief that the figure was gone. "There's something that makes that shadow, Carlotta," he said, turning to his sister.

Carlotta was still staring out at the wall.

"It's gone, my dear," he said.

She opened her lips twice to speak, then breathlessly closed them again. Then she said quietly, "No. It's still there. It's moved over about two yards, just behind the bush on the left. I can still see it. I—I don't think it's a shadow."

The composer turned and looked toward the wall, but after a half-minute of careful scrutiny, he shook his head. "Nonsense," he said. "There's nothing there."

Since she continued to stare into the garden, he rose abruptly before her, cutting off her sight. "Look here, Carlotta," he said, his voice edged with sternness, "you feed your imagination too much."

For a moment her eyes seemed not to see him; then they came slowly back to focus. She smiled, and with a little nod, said, "Perhaps so. But that shadow's still there."

They stood challenging each other with their eyes for a few moments. Then abruptly she turned and went from the room, and after a momentary hesitation Jepson sat down again, looked fleetingly into the garden, and returned to the score he had been studying, thinking how very much smoother things would be if Carlotta could be persuaded to tire of being an invalid.

FOUR days passed, during which Jepson had noticed about his sister a vague uneasiness which disturbed him. It was unusual for Carlotta to betray even the slightest emotion. For a moment he had hoped the life of an invalid had begun to pall, but he knew his sister too well to entertain any illusions on that score.

Carlotta suddenly unburdened her mind at luncheon one day, when, without unusual asperity, she cut her brother off as he began a discussion of his work.

"I think I'd like to live somewhere else," she said abruptly.

"My dear!" he said firmly.

"I think it's the house," continued Carlotta. "It upsets me—it almost frightens me."

He looked at her a moment as if he had not heard aright. Then he spoke. "Nonsense. What you need, Carlotta, is some good fresh air, and exercise."

"Well, I don't know," she replied quickly. "Maybe I do, but I don't think so. I'm fitted for a sedentary life, Peter, and I never before needed air and exercise. No, it's the house, I'm sure, and that's odd, come to think of it."

"Very," agreed Jepson dryly. He grunted ungraciously and then, having finished his meal, excused himself and left his sister to stare earnestly at the crumbling, vine-grown bricks of the garden wall discernible through the trees.

But the memory of Carlotta's words bothered him, and to himself he was forced to admit that he had not slept as well as he might have. Carlotta had probably been affected the same way. He considered this, until finally he rose and began to walk about the old house, studying it as he went. There was nothing damp about it, he decided, remembering Carlotta's original complaint. It grew upon him as he went along that the atmosphere was rather uncannily close, but there was nothing unusual about that in a house which had been kept closed as long as this one had been. Despite the closeness of it, the atmosphere was pleasant and, after a few minutes, he returned to his work, chafing at the time he had lost on his sister's fancies.

On the following day Carlotta again insinuated her fancies into the conversation at table.

"Well," said Jepson, resigned at last, "just what is it you feel?"

Carlotta looked at him unsteadily, her high forehead making her large brown eyes look larger. She leaned forward over the table and said softly, "I always have a horrible feeling that we're not alone, that there are others here, others we can feel and sometimes see, like the other day in the garden. And they're trying to get in—I can feel it, especially in the night."

For a moment Jepson regarded her in amazement. "Others here—trying to get in?" he repeated in astonishment. Then, "Carlotta, I think you're ill."

Carlotta shook her head; her voice rose. "I can feel them trying to get at us, I can feel them. I don't know what they want, but I'm afraid, Peter, I'm really afraid. At night I wake up, and I'm in deadly terror—because I think someone has closed the shutters, and I'm shut in with them. And then I've a horror of that garden wall, ever since I saw the man there. I don't want to stay here any longer, Peter. I don't feel like myself any more. Sometimes I feel like another person. Yesterday I wanted to call you *Mark*—it was on the tip of my tongue, and I thought, how could you be *Mark?* You're Peter; I never knew anyone named Mark. That's why I want to go away."

For a breathless instant Jepson's astonishment held him speechless. Then, feeling the intensity of her voice and fearing for her sanity, he leaned over suddenly and began to pat her gently on her arm. "I'll do what I can, my dear," he promised, restraining his amazement with difficulty.

"That's good," said Carlotta, and resumed her meal as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place.

He watched her narrowly for a short time; then he, too, gave his attention once more to the meal.

Carlotta, having finished presently, leaned back in her chair and said casually, "By the way, Peter, I haven't heard you play Schumann's *Vogel als Prophet* for years as perfectly as you played it last night."

Jepson looked up in open-mouthed surprize. He put his fork down next his plate.

"What?" he asked incredulously. "What did you say?"

She looked at him in mild irritation. "The *Vogel als Prophet,*" she repeated. "You played it very well last night."

"Last night," he murmured hesitantly. "Last night? But I didn't go near the piano after dinner yesterday," he protested in a flustered voice. "And I haven't played the *Vogel als Prophet* for months. You must have been dreaming, Carlotta."

She considered him, vague alarm for him evident on her face. "Oh, that's impossible, Peter. I was awake. I couldn't sleep. Why, I was even sitting up in bed. Oh, there's no doubt that I heard it—clear as could be. So you must have played it."

"But I didn't," he almost shouted. "I went to bed shortly after you did last night. I didn't go near the piano." He felt an unreasonable impulse to be furiously angry.

She raised her eyebrows and fixed him with startled eyes.

"But, Peter," she said gently, "I *know* I heard it. Then you must have played it in your sleep."

"What nonsense!" he snapped. "I am not and never have been a sleepwalker."

She regarded him for a moment with a baffled expression on her face. Then presently, almost belligerently, she said, "I suppose you'll tell me too that you weren't beating time or something in your room last night with metal rods. Don't start shaking your head—I heard it just as plainly as I heard the music—*clink, clink, clink*—until I thought I'd have a headache. And I'm sure I heard you counting once in a while, too. There's no mistake about it."

"My God!" he murmured. It was all he could think of saying. And when she struck the table sharply with the flat of her hand and demanded to know what he had to say, he added meekly that very likely he *had* been sleepwalking. Seeing that this appeared to satisfy her, he left the table and went almost frantically to the telephone in his study, thanking whatever powers there were that Doctor Evans, the famous nerve specialist, had chosen to retire to Sac Prairie, his home town. He called the doctor and asked him to come as soon as possible to see Carlotta.

For the rest of the afternoon he was incapable of working under the stress of what he considered Carlotta's alarmingly violent hallucinations. He was troubled, too, by the persistently recurring memory of an uneasy dream he had had the previous night—a vague dream of four people about his bed, striving to touch him. He had got up that morning with the feeling of someone unknown close to him—a feeling as of someone trying to get at him, and now Carlotta's words had brought this feeling back to him. He remembered, too, the story of the bachelor tenant who had left the house saying that something had been trying to get *into him.*

DOCTOR EVANS examined Carlotta that evening. When he came down the stairs after the examination, Jepson was waiting impatiently for him.

"Well, what do you make of her case?" he demanded.

"Very curious, very curious," murmured the doctor cautiously. "Certainly the house upsets her. Of course, it's a well-known fact that some places and often some people have disturbing effects on individuals, particularly nervous people like your sister. I could recount almost any number of similar cases."

"In your opinion, then, the house has a bad effect on her?"

Doctor Evans hesitated. "Bad? Well, it upsets her, as I said. I can't say it has an evil effect on her, but of course if this becomes chronic, her nerves will natural-

ly suffer. I feel that she believes there's someone in the building, a group of people, evidently, whom she appears to think imprisoned here and who are trying to get at her. That sounds dangerously like incipient paranoia. The shutters seem to give her that suggestion, but I understand from her nurse that they're never closed. As a matter of fact, two people went mad in this house—I suppose you know that."

He stopped suddenly, an expression on his face as of some startling thought occurring to him.

"Mark Brendon and his wife," he murmured. "What an odd coincidence! I remember their persistent madness. It was dormant in the old folks, and came out in them—this feeling about the shutters. They were maddened by the obsession that the shutters and the garden wall were keeping them from the town. Singular coincidence, isn't it?"

"You surely don't think that there's some *influence* at work?" asked Jepson incredulously, raising his voice. Even as he asked the question, a sudden suspicion assailed him.

Doctor Evans shook his head. "Oh, don't misunderstand me. I'm intimating nothing of the sort. Of course, there have been foolish rumors about the house, but they can be traced mostly to small boys, and I'm sure you know as well as I do that for the small town boy, a haunted house is almost a psychological necessity."

"You're hedging, Doctor."

"And you're jumping at conclusions, Mr. Jepson," said the doctor somewhat sharply. "Your sister's extremely nervous—that's all. I do think the house affects her, and if I were you, I'd remove her at once, or she may develop phobias."

For a moment Jepson faced the doctor, challenging him. But a host of troubled thoughts surged forward in his mind, and abruptly he asked. "Tell me, Doctor, is there such a thing as psychic force?"

Doctor Evans looked uneasy and glanced hastily at his watch.

"Yes," he said, somewhat reluctantly, "there is. Don't ask me to explain the why of it—I can't. But there is such a thing, indeed, yes. Psychic residue, some people call it. Often left at the scene of violent deaths, accidents, or vivid emotional outbursts."

"Like madness?"

"Like madness," replied the doctor.

They looked at each other wordlessly, the doctor fidgetting with his hat.

"And can whatever forces leave psychic residue return to this place?" demanded Jepson. "Can they come back—say, people who have died?"

"I don't know," said the doctor. "Are you expecting me to declare a belief in ghosts?"

Jepson ignored the question. "Tell me," he asked, with an odd intensity in his voice, "which of the rooms in this house was Josiah Brendon's bedroom, and who used to have the room my sister is occupying now?"

The doctor, somewhat disconcerted, thought a bit. Presently he replied, "Old Josiah's room is the one just above your study, and——"

"My bedroom," interrupted Peter.

"And the room your sister has now used to be Elva Brendon's."

"Ah," said Jepson oddly. "And money being counted might sound like somebody beating time with metal rods, mightn't it?"

Doctor Evans looked at him with a professional eye, his first reaction one of alarm for Jepson's sanity.

"Tell me, Doctor," Jepson went on immediately, "did you know Elva Brendon very well?"

"Oh, yes," said the doctor expansively,

and with some relief to find that Jepson's question was normal, coming as it did after his apparently irrelevant comment about money being counted. "A tall, handsome woman with silvery hair—what they call platinum blond now. But so sensitive!"

"Did she play the piano?" Jepson cut in.

"Very well, indeed."

"And I suppose she had a favorite piece?" pressed Jepson, an impatient eagerness in his voice.

"Oh, yes, two or three of them," replied the doctor. "But her prime favorite was a lovely little thing by Schumann—let me see, it was—yes, *The Bird as Prophet.*"

Jepson drew a deep breath and half turned.

"Very well," he said suddenly, "I'll do as you suggest. Carlotta will be taken away; we'll both leave the house as soon as I can manage, the end of the week possibly. And thank you very much, Doctor. I shall expect your bill shortly."

Doctor Evans took his departure with a side-eyed glance at Jepson, and the growing belief that sooner or later the composer would need medical attention.

HAVING seen the doctor to the door, Jepson went upstairs to his sister. He sat down in a low lounging-chair next her couch.

"My dear," he asked abruptly, "are you sure it was the Schumann *Vogel als Prophet* you heard the other night?"

"Quite," said his sister firmly.

He pondered this. "And the clinking noise you heard—that could have been someone counting coins, couldn't it?"

She considered the suggestion and presently nodded. "Yes, it could," she said.

"Very well," he replied, smiling. "I've decided to take another house, Carlotta. We'll move the end of this week."

"Oh," she said shortly. Then, "What changed your mind so swiftly?"

"The doctor," he answered. "He thought the house might be unhealthy."

She nodded contentedly. Then suddenly she looked queerly around the room. Leaning forward, she caught his sleeve and whispered harshly, "Sooner, if we can. They're creeping closer—I can feel them trying to get in. The young one—she's the strongest."

Jepson did not trust himself to reply. He smiled sickishly and slipped from the room.

He went to bed that night shortly after ten o'clock, his mind crowded with troubled thoughts. He went to sleep feeling uncannily that his sister's hallucinations had a basis in fact.

Presently his troubled mind succumbed to dreams. He saw himself in the house from somewhere beyond it. He was in the house and he could feel himself in the house, yet he seemed to be looking down from a height. He saw Carlotta, her nurse, the maid, the cook—and four others weaving through the shadows of the garden, four strange figures, an old man, and an old woman, and not far from them, a young man with a young woman standing a little ahead. In his dream he recognized them as he saw them—Josiah Brendon, the miser, and his wife, the misanthrope, Mark Brendon and his wife, Elva, whose hair shone silver against the limitless darkness of the dream.

They came drifting toward the house in a terrifying silence, motionless save for their intent movements. Presently he saw them in the house, the young woman in the lead, a fiercely feral expression on her face. She was like a huntress. They were on the stairs, she still in the lead, though she had paused for a moment at

the piano; and now in the hall on the second floor. The old man drifted into the room where the detached Jepson lay asleep, and presently he was sitting on the floor counting out money. Elva went on into Carlotta's room, while Mark and his mother hung back in the hall.

Then there was a startlingly vivid scene —Elva advancing upon Carlotta, who lay asleep, unaware of the fiercely eager eyes bearing down upon her. There was a sharp feeling of something trying to get in.

He came suddenly awake. The bedroom door had creaked open. He sat up in bed and moved to pull on the bed-lamp, but even as his hand rose, it was caught at the wrist, and before he could jerk it away, his sister's voice coming out of the darkness made it unnecessary.

"Good God, Carlotta, what are you doing?" he demanded.

"They're in the garden, they're in the garden, all four of them," she replied in a hushed and agitated voice. "They'll be coming in."

He made as if to put on the light, but again she stopped him.

"They might see," she warned. "Go to the window and look. They're coming."

He leapt from bed and went incautiously to the window. Then he drew sharply back into the shadow, away from the parallelogram of moonlight.

For there *were* people in the garden. Peter had a moment of anger at the invasion; then his anger froze into chilling alarm at the sudden recurrence of his dream. He stared intently down. There were four of them, just as Carlotta had said, just as he had dreamed. Four people coming slowly and intently down the path through the garden toward the house, a young woman in the lead, a young white-haired man following after, and at last an old man and an old woman. They were still-faced and pale in the moonlight, and their clothes were oddly black-green in the quiet light from above. They came stiffly on, their faces expressionless and cold, the young woman's lips slightly parted. They drifted past bushes and trees, momentarily lost in the deep shadows of overhanging limbs.

Then they came out into the clear moonlight before the French windows of his study below, and Jepson saw that the four of them stood unshadowed in the clear cold light from the summer moon —four figures standing inconceivably without shadows in a patch of unbroken moonlight!

There could no longer be any doubt— the four were the same as those of his ghastly dream—the Brendons. They had come back to reclaim this house, to find if possible new openings for material life!

At that moment Carlotta came trembling to his side. "Don't let them come in, don't let them come in. I'm afraid. It's the woman—the young woman— she's been here before, the night I heard you playing the piano. I didn't want to say anything—it was after that. She came to my room."

"They can't come in," he said dryly, remembering, even as he said it, that he had left the French windows open against the warm summer night. "I'll keep them out," he added. Then he flung himself away from the window, out of the room, and down the stairs.

The French windows stood wide, unbroken moonlight flooding the floor, its reflected radiance holding the room in a silver dusk. He stood for a moment undecided; then he went forward and looked cautiously outside. There was nothing there. He backed apprehensively

into the room, chill terror creeping possessively into him, and closed the French windows behind him.

Then he heard something from above: a *clink—clink—clink,* coming from his bedroom.

He whirled at a gentle breath of melody from the piano, but there was nothing there. Then he flung himself across the room and put on the light, leaning against the wall in the welcome glow that brought the room to life. After a minute, he looked carefully out into the hall and, seeing nothing, put on the light there, too.

He moved slowly toward the stairs, his eyes searching every darkened corner. Reaching the foot of the stairs, he turned to look around. He saw nothing.

Then abruptly he heard Carlotta's nurse scream.

He stood frozen while lights went up above, and in a moment the nurse herself appeared at the head of the stairs, her eyes wide with terror.

"Oh, Mr. Jepson!" she cried, seeing him.

Her voice broke him from his fright. He mounted the stairs, only dimly hearing the nurse say, "It's Miss Carlotta—something's wrong. She's talking very queerly. I can't seem able to do anything with her."

"I'll go to her," he said thickly.

In a moment he was standing outside his sister's room, her voice coming to him from within. Then he opened the door. He saw Carlotta on her knees at the window, looking out at the crumbling old garden wall.

He was nonplussed. "Carlotta," he said sharply, "you'll take cold there. Go back to bed."

"If you'll take them away," she replied in a low, unnatural voice, not turning from the glass. "Only take them away."

Jepson strode forward and stood over her, alarmed, looking down at her white face.

"I can't even see over the wall any more, and the garden—it's only weeds, vile, ugly weeds. And those awful shutters everywhere. Oh, Mark, take them away from my window. Always closed before my eyes. Take them away!"

"Carlotta!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"Take them away, Mark. I can't see anything. I can't see the town." Her voice was a weary monotone, not recognizable to him.

He led her over and put her tenderly on her bed. "Carlotta," he murmured distractedly. He took hold of her hand and began to chafe it. He looked at her still face, and into eyes that did not see him. His hands were trembling.

"I could get better then, Mark—only take them away."

He stood shuddering, the memory of his dream and its meaning thrusting itself into his mind. Then suddenly he shouted loudly for the nurse and ran from the room to summon the doctor.

As he stood over the telephone, his eyes caught movement in the moonlit square before the French windows. There were three figures moving down the garden path—a young man, an old man, and an old woman. The young woman was gone—Elva was gone, back in her old room. And the harsh voice that screamed from above was no longer alone Carlotta's, but partly Elva's, a voice that rose in sheer, maddening terror.

"Take them away! Take — them — away!"

He had waited too long. There would always be shutters now for Carlotta. Like an automaton he lifted the telephone from its cradle and called the doctor.

"That little monster had climbed a trifle higher."

The Mannikin

By ROBERT BLOCH

What was the thing that moved and writhed on Simon Maglore's back?—a tale of stark horror

MIND you, I cannot swear that my story is true. It may have been a dream; or worse, a symptom of some severe mental disorder. But I believe it is true. After all, how are we to know what things there are on earth? Strange monstrosities still exist, and foul, incredible perversions. Every war, each new geographical or scientific discovery, brings to light some new bit of ghastly

evidence that the world is not altogether the sane place we fondly imagine it to be. Sometimes peculiar incidents occur which hint of utter madness.

How can we be sure that our smug conceptions of reality actually exist? To one man in a million dreadful knowledge is revealed, and the rest of us remain mercifully ignorant. There have been travelers who never came back, and research workers who disappeared. Some of those who did return were deemed mad because of what they told, and others sensibly concealed the wisdom that had so horribly been revealed. Blind as we are, we know a little of what lurks beneath our normal life. There have been tales of sea-serpents and creatures of the deep; legends of dwarfs and giants; records of queer medical horrors and unnatural births. Stunted nightmares of men's personalities have blossomed into being under the awful stimulus of war, or pestilence, or famine. There have been cannibals, necrophiles, and ghouls; loathsome rites of worship and sacrifice; maniacal murders, and blasphemous crimes. When I think, then, of what *I* saw and heard, and compare it with certain other grotesque and unbelievable authenticities, I begin to fear for my reason.

But if there is any *sane* explanation of this matter, I wish to God I may be told before it is too late. Doctor Pierce tells me that I must be calm; he advised me to write this account in order to allay my apprehension. But I am not calm, and I never can be calm until I know the truth, once and for all; until I am wholly convinced that my fears are not founded on a hideous reality.

I was already a nervous man when I went to Bridgetown for a rest. It had been a hard grind that year at school, and I was very glad to get away from the tedious classroom routine. The success of my lecture courses assured my position on the faculty for the year to come, and consequently I dismissed all academic speculation from my mind when I decided to take a vacation. I chose to go to Bridgetown because of the excellent facilities the lake afforded for trout-fishing. The resort I chose from the voluminous array of hotel literature was a quiet, peaceful place, according to the simple prospectus. It did not offer a golf-course, a bridle-path, or an indoor swimming-pool. There was no mention made of a grand ballroom, an eighteen-piece orchestra, or formal dinner. Best of all, the advertisement in no way extolled the scenic grandeur of the lake and woods. It did not polysyllabically proclaim that Lake Kane was "Nature's eternal paradise, where cerulean skies and verdant wilderness beckon the happy visitor to taste the joys of youth." For that reason I wired in a reservation, packed my bag, assembled my pipes, and left.

I WAS more than satisfied with the place when I arrived. Bridgetown is a small, rustic village; a quaint survival of older and simpler days. Situated on Lake Kane itself, it is surrounded by rambling woods, and sloping, sun-splashed meadows where the farm-folk toil in serene content. The blight of modern civilization has but dimly fallen upon these people and their quiet ways. Automobiles, tractors, and the like are few. There are several telephones, and five miles away the State Highway affords easy access to the city. That is all. The homes are old, the streets cobbled. Artists, suburban dilettantes and professional esthetes have not yet invaded the pastoral scene. The quota of summer guests is small and select. A few hunters and fishers come, but none of the ordinary pleasure-hunting crowd. The families thereabout do not cater to such

tastes; ignorant and unsophisticated as they are, they can recognize vulgarity.

So my surroundings were ideal. The place I stayed at was a three-story hostelry on the lake itself—the Kane House, run by Absolom Gates. He was a character of the old school; a grizzled, elderly veteran whose father had been in the fishery business back in the sixties. He, himself, was a devotee of things piscatorial; but only from the Waltonian view. His resort was a fisherman's Mecca. The rooms were large and airy; the food plentiful and excellently prepared by Gates' widowed sister. After my first inspection, I prepared to enjoy a remarkably pleasant stay.

Then, upon my first visit to the village, I bumped into Simon Maglore on the street.

I first met Simon Maglore during my second term as an instructor back at college. Even then, he had impressed me greatly. This was not due to his physical characteristics alone, though they were unusual enough. He was tall and thin, with massive, stooping shoulders, and a crooked back. He was not a hunchback in the usual sense of the word, but was afflicted with a peculiar tumorous growth beneath his left shoulder-blade. This growth he took some pains to conceal, but its prominence made such attempts unsuccessful. Outside of this unfortunate deformity, however, Maglore had been a very pleasant-looking fellow. Black-haired, gray-eyed, fair of skin, he seemed a fine specimen of intelligent manhood. And it was this intelligence that had so impressed me. His class-work was strikingly brilliant, and at times his theses attained heights of sheer genius. Despite the peculiarly morbid trend of his work in poetry and essays, it was impossible to ignore the power and imagination that could produce such wild imagery and eldritch color. One of his poems—*The Witch Is Hung*—won for him the Edsworth Memorial Prize for that year, and several of his major themes were republished in certain private anthologies.

From the first, I had taken a great interest in the young man and his unusual talent. He had not responded to my advances at first; I gathered that he was a solitary soul. Whether this was due to his physical peculiarity or his mental trend, I cannot say. He had lived alone in town, and was known to have ample means. He did not mingle with the other students, though they would have welcomed him for his ready wit, his charming disposition, and his vast knowledge of literature and art. Gradually, however, I managed to overcome his natural reticence, and won his friendship. He invited me to his rooms, and we talked.

I had then learned of his earnest belief in the occult and esoteric. He had told me of his ancestors in Italy, and their interest in sorcery. One of them had been an agent of the Medici. They had migrated to America in the early days, because of certain charges made against them by the Holy Inquisition. He also spoke of his own studies in the realms of the unknown. His rooms were filled with strange drawings he had made from dreams, and still stranger images done in clay. The shelves of his bookcases held many odd and ancient books. I noted Ranfts' *De Masticatione Mortuorum in Tumulis* (1734); the almost priceless *Cabala of Saboth* (Greek translation, circa 1686); Mycroft's *Commentaries on Witchcraft;* and Ludvig Prinn's infamous *Mysteries of the Worm.*

I made several visits to the apartments before Maglore left school so suddenly in the fall of '33. The death of his parents called him to the East, and he left without saying farewell. But in the in-

terim I had learned to respect him a good deal, and had taken a keen interest in his future plans, which included a book on the history of witch cult survivals in America, and a novel dealing with the psychological effects of superstition on the mind. He had never written to me, and I heard no more about him until this chance meeting on the village street.

He recognized me. I doubt if I should have been able to identify him. He had changed. As we shook hands I noted his unkempt appearance and careless attire. He looked older. His face was thinner, and much paler. There were shadows around his eyes—and in them. His hands trembled; his face forced a lifeless smile. His voice was deeper when he spoke, but he inquired after my health in the same charming fashion he had always affected. Quickly I explained my presence, and began to question him.

He informed me that he lived here in town; had lived here ever since the death of his parents. He was working very hard just now on his books, but he felt that the result of his labors more than justified any physical inconveniences he might suffer. He apologized for his untidy apparel and his tired manner. He wanted to have a long talk with me sometime soon, but he would be very busy for the next few days. Possibly next week he would look me up at the hotel —just now he must get some paper at the village store and go back to his home. With an abrupt farewell, he turned his back on me and departed.

As he did so I received another start. The hump on his back had grown. It was now virtually twice the size it had been when I first met him, and it was no longer possible to hide it in the least. Undoubtedly the hard work had taken severe toll of Maglore's energies. I thought of a sarcoma, and shuddered.

Walking back to the hotel, I did some thinking. Simon's haggardness appalled me. It was not healthful for him to work so hard, and his choice of subject was not any too wholesome. The constant isolation and the nervous strain were combining to undermine his constitution in an alarming way, and I determined to appoint myself a mentor over his course. I resolved to visit him at the earliest opportunity, without waiting for a formal invitation. Something must be done.

Upon my arrival at the hotel I got another idea. I would ask Gates what he knew about Simon and his work. Perhaps there was some interesting sidelight on his activity which might account for his curious transformation. I therefore sought out the worthy gentleman and broached the subject to him.

What I learned from him startled me. It appears that the villagers did not like Master Simon, or his family. The old folks had been wealthy enough, but their name had a dubious repute cast upon it ever since the early days. Witches and warlocks, one and all, made up the family line. Their dark deeds had been carefully hidden from the first, but the folk around them could tell. It appears that nearly all of the Maglores had possessed certain physical malformations that had made them conspicuous. Some had been born with veils; others with club-feet. One or two were dwarfed, and all had at some time or another been accused of possessing the fabled "evil eye". Several of them had been nyctalops—they could see in the dark. Simon was not the first crookback in the family, by any means. His grandfather had it, and *his* grandsire before him.

There was much talk of inbreeding and clan-segregation, too. That, in the opinion of Gates and his fellows, clearly pointed to one thing—wizardry. Nor

was this their only evidence. Did not the Maglores shun the village and shut themselves away in the old house on the hill? None of them attended church, either. Were they not known to take long walks after dark, on nights when all decent, self-respecting people were safe in bed?

There were probably good reasons why they were unfriendly. Perhaps they had things they wished to hide in their old house, and maybe they were afraid of letting any talk get around. Folk had it that the place was full of wicked and heathenish books, and there was an old story that the whole family were fugitives from some foreign place or other because of what they had done. After all, who could say? They looked suspicious; they acted queerly; maybe they were. Of course, nobody could rightly tell. The mass hysteria of witch-burning and the herd-mania of satanic possession had not penetrated to this part of the country. There was no talk of altars in the woods, and the spectral forest presences of Indian myth. No disappearances —bovine or human—could be laid at the doors of the Maglore family. Legally, their record was clear. But folk feared them. And this new one—Simon—was the worst.

He never had acted right. His mother died at his birth. Had to get a doctor from out of the city—no local man would handle such a case. The boy had nearly died, too. For several years nobody had seen him. His father and his uncle had spent all their time taking care of him. When he was seven, the lad had been sent away to a private school. He came back once, when he was about twelve. That was when his uncle died. He went mad, or something of the sort. At any rate, he had an attack which resulted in a cerebral hemorrhage, as the doctor called it.

Simon then was a nice-looking lad—except for the hump, of course. But it did not seem to bother him at the time—indeed, it was quite small. He had stayed several weeks and then gone off to school again. He had not reappeared until his father's death, two years ago. The old man died all alone in that great house, and the body was not discovered until several weeks later. A passing peddler had called; walked into the open parlor, and found old Jeffrey Maglore dead in his great chair. His eyes were open, and filled with a look of frightful dread. Before him was a great iron book, filled with queer, undecipherable characters.

A hurriedly summoned physician pronounced it death due to heart-failure. But the peddler, after staring into those fear-filled eyes, and glancing at the odd, disturbing figures in the book, was not so sure. He had no opportunity to look around any further, however, for that night the son arrived.

People looked at him very queerly when he came, for no notice had yet been sent to him of his father's death. They were very still indeed when he exhibited a two-weeks' old letter in the old man's handwriting which announced a premonition of imminent death, and advised the young man to come home. The carefully guarded phrases of this letter seemed to hold a secret meaning; for the youth never even bothered to ask the circumstances of his father's death. The funeral was private; the customary interment being held in the cellar vaults beneath the house.

THE gruesome and peculiar events of Simon Maglore's homecoming immediately put the country-folk on their guard. Nor did anything occur to alter their original opinion of the boy. He stayed on all alone in the silent house.

He had no servants, and made no friends. His infrequent trips to the village were made only for the purpose of obtaining supplies. He took the purchases back himself, in his car. He bought a good deal of meat and fish. Once in a while he stopped in at the drug-store, where he purchased sedatives. He never appeared talkative, and replied to questions in monosyllables. Still, he was obviously well educated. It was generally rumored that he was writing a book. Gradually his visits became more and more infrequent.

People now began to comment on his changed appearance. Slowly but surely he was altering, in an unpleasant way. First of all, it was noticed that his deformity was increasing. He was forced to wear a voluminous overcoat to hide its bulk. He walked with a slight stoop, as though its weight troubled him. Still, he never went to a doctor, and none of the townsfolk had the courage to comment or question him on his condition. He was aging, too. He began to resemble his uncle Richard, and his eyes had taken on that lambent cast which hinted of a nyctaloptic power. All this excited its share of comment among people to whom the Maglore family had been a matter of interesting conjecture for generations.

Later this speculation had been based on more tangible developments. For recently Simon had made an appearance at various isolated farmhouses throughout the region, on a furtive errand.

He questioned the old folks, mostly. He was writing a book, he told them, on folk-lore. He wanted to ask them about the old legends of the neighborhood. Had any of them ever heard stories concerning local cults, or rumors about rites in the woods? Were there any haunted houses, or shunned places in the forest? Had they ever heard the name "Nyarlathotep", or references to "Shub-Niggurath" and "the Black Messenger"? Could they recall anything of the old Pasquantog Indian myths about "the beast-men", or remember stories of black covens that sacrificed cattle on the hills? These and similar questions put the naturally suspicious farmers on their guard. If they had any such knowledge, it was decidedly unwholesome in its nature, and they did not care to reveal it to this self-avowed outsider. Some of them knew of such things from old tales brought from the upper coast, and others had heard whispered nightmares from recluses in the eastern hills. There were a lot of things about these matters which they frankly did not know, and what they suspected was not for outside ears to hear. Everywhere he went, Maglore met with evasions or frank rebuffs, and he left behind a distinctly bad impression.

The story of these visits spread. They became the topic for an elaborate discussion. One oldster in particular—a farmer named Thatcherton, who lived alone in a secluded stretch to the west of the lake, off the main highway—had a singularly arresting story to tell. Maglore had appeared one night around eight o'clock, and knocked on the door. He persuaded his host to admit him to the parlor, and then tried to cajole him into revealing certain information regarding the presence of an abandoned cemetery that was reputed to exist somewhere in the vicinity.

The farmer said that his guest was in an almost hysterical state, that he rambled on and on in a most melodramatic fashion, and made frequent allusion to a lot of mythological gibberish about "secrets of the grave," "the thirteenth covenant," "the Feast of Ulder," and the "Doel chants." There was also talk of "the ritual of Father Yig," and certain names were brought up in connection

with queer forest ceremonies said to occur near this graveyard. Maglore asked if cattle ever disappeared, and if his host ever heard "voices in the forest that made proposals."

These things the man absolutely denied, and he refused to allow his visitor to come back and inspect the premises by day. At this the unexpected guest became very angry, and was on the point of making a heated rejoinder, when something strange occurred. Maglore suddenly turned very pale, and asked to be excused. He seemed to have a severe attack of internal cramps; for he doubled up and staggered to the door. As he did so, Thatcherton received the shocking impression that the hump on his back was *moving!* It seemed to writhe and slither on Maglore's shoulders, as though he had an animal concealed beneath his coat! At this juncture Maglore turned around sharply, and backed toward the exit, as if trying to conceal this unusual phenomenon. He went out hastily, without another word, and raced down the drive to the car. He ran like an ape, vaulted madly into the driver's seat, and sent the wheels spinning as he roared out of the yard. He disappeared into the night, leaving behind him a sadly puzzled man, who lost no time in spreading the tale of his fantastic visitor among his friends.

Since then such incidents had abruptly ceased, and until this afternoon Maglore had not reappeared in the village. But people were still talking, and he was not welcome. It would be well to avoid the man, whatever he was.

Such was the substance of my friend Gates' story. When he concluded, I retired to my room without comment, to meditate upon the tale.

I was not inclined to share the local superstitions. Long experience in such matters made me automatically discredit the bulk of its detail. I knew enough of rural psychology to realize that anything out of the ordinary is looked upon with suspicion. Suppose the Maglore family were reclusive: what then? Any group of foreign extraction would naturally be. Granted that they were racially deformed —that did not make them witches. Popular fancy has persecuted many people for sorcery whose only crime lay in some physical defect. Even inbreeding was naturally to be expected when social ostracism was inflicted. But what is there of magic in that? It's common enough in such rural back-waters, heaven knows, and not only among foreigners, either. Queer books? Likely. Nyctalops? Common enough among all peoples. Insanity? Perhaps—lonely minds often degenerate. Simon was brilliant, however. Unfortunately, his trend toward the mystical and the unknown was leading him astray. It had been poor judgment that led him to seek information for his book from the illiterate country people. Naturally, they were intolerant and distrustful. And his poor physical condition assumed exaggerated importance in the eyes of these credulous folk.

Still, there was probably enough truth in these distorted accounts to make it imperative that I talk to Maglore at once. He must get out of this unhealthful atmosphere, and see a reputable physician. His genius should not be wasted or destroyed through such an environmental obstacle. It would wreck him, mentally and physically. I decided to visit him on the morrow.

After this resolution, I went downstairs to supper, took a short stroll along the shores of the moonlit lake, and retired for the night.

The following afternoon, I carried out my intention. The Maglore mansion stood on a bluff about a half-mile out of

Bridgetown, and frowned dismally down upon the lake. It was not a cheerful place; it was too old, and too neglected. I conjured up a mental image of what those gaping windows must look like on a moonless night, and shuddered. Those empty openings reminded me of the eyes of a blind bat. The two gables resembled its hooded head, and the broad, peaked side-chambers might serve as wings. When I realized the trend of my thought I felt surprized and disturbed. As I walked up the long, tree-shadowed walk I endeavored to gain a firm command over my imagination. I was here on a definite errand.

I was almost composed when I rang the bell. Its ghostly tinkle echoed down the serpentine corridors within. Faint, shuffling footsteps sounded, and then, with a grating clang, the door opened. There, limned against the doorway, stood Simon Maglore.

At the sight of him my new-born composure gave way to a sudden dismay and an overpowering distaste. He looked sinister in that gray, wavering light. His thin, stooping body was hunched at a repellent angle, and his hands were clenched at his sides. His blurred outline reminded me of a crouching beast. Only his face was wholly visible. It was a waxen mask of death, from which two eyes glared with ghoulish light. That was it! Maglore looked like a crouching ghoul! A physical nausea welled up in my soul, and I longed to wind my hands around that withered neck, or batter my two fists into that leering face. A smile writhed its way over that twisted countenance, a smile of sly, lurking evil. The fretted lips curled back in a fanged grimace of idiotic mirth.

"You see I am not myself today, you fool. Go away!" The creature chuckled, as if in relish over some subtle jest known only to itself. Then its voice changed to a sudden shriek. "Go away, you fool—go away!" The door slammed in my astounded face, and I found myself alone.

But I was not alone on the walk home; for my thoughts were haunted by the presence of another—that ghastly, grisly creature that had once been my friend, Simon Maglore.

2

I was still dazed when I arrived back in the village. But after I had reached my room in the hotel, I began to reason with myself. That romantic imagination of mine had played me a sorry trick. Poor Maglore was ill—probably a victim of some severe nervous disorder. I recalled the report of his buying sedatives at the local pharmacy. In my foolish emotionalism I had sadly misconstrued his unfortunate sickness. What a child I had been! I must go back tomorrow, and apologize. After that, Maglore must be persuaded to go away and get himself back into proper shape once more. He *had* looked pretty bad, and his temper was getting the best of him, too. How the man had changed!

That night I slept but little. Early the following morning I again set out. This time I carefully avoided the disquieting mental images that the old house suggested to my susceptible mind. I was all business when I rang that bell.

It was a different Maglore who met me. He, too, had changed for the better. He looked ill, and old, but there was a normal light in his eyes and a saner intonation in his voice as he courteously bade me enter, and apologized for his delirious spasm of the day before. He was subject to frequent attacks, he told me, and planned to get away very short-

ly and take a long rest. He was eager to complete his book—there was only a little to do, now—and go back to his work at college. From this statement he abruptly switched the conversation to a series of reminiscent interludes. He recalled our mutual association on the campus as we sat in the parlor, and seemed eager to hear about the affairs at school. For nearly an hour he virtually monopolized the conversation and steered it in such a manner as to preclude any direct inquiries or questions of a personal nature on my part.

Nevertheless, it was easy for me to see that he was far from well. He sounded as though he were laboring under an intense strain; his words seemed forced, his statements stilted. Once again I noted how pale he was; how bloodless. His malformed back seemed immense; his body correspondingly shrunken. I recalled my fears of a cancerous tumor, and wondered. Meanwhile he rambled on, obviously ill at ease. The parlor seemed almost bare; the book-cases were unlined, and the empty spaces filled with dust. No papers or manuscripts were visible on the table. A spider had spun its web upon the ceiling; it hung down like the thin locks on the forehead of a corpse.

During a pause in his conversation, I asked him about his work. He answered vaguely that it was very involved, and was taking up most of his time. He had made some very interesting discoveries, however, which would amply repay him for his pains. It would excite him too much in his present condition if he went into detail about what he was doing, but he could tell me that his findings in the field of witchcraft alone would add new chapters to anthropological and metaphysical history. He was particularly interested in the old lore about "familiars"—the tiny creatures who were said to be emissaries of the devil, and were supposed to attend the witch or wizard in the form of a small animal—rat, cat, mole, or ousel. Sometimes they were represented as existing on the body of the warlock himself, or subsisting upon it for their nourishment. The idea of a "devil's teat" on the witches' bodies from which their familiar drew sustenance in blood was fully illuminated by Maglore's findings. His book had a medical aspect, too; it really endeavored to put such statements on a scientific basis. The effects of glandular disorders in cases of so-called "demonic possession" were also treated.

At this point Maglore abruptly concluded. He felt very tired, he said, and must get some rest. But he hoped to be finished with his work very shortly, and then he wanted to get away for a long rest. It was not wholesome for him to live alone in this old house, and at times he was troubled with disturbing fancies and queer lapses of memory. He had no alternative, however, at present, because the nature of his investigations demanded both privacy and solitude. At times his experiments impinged on certain ways and courses best left undisturbed, and he was not sure just how much longer he would be able to stand the strain. It was in his blood, though—I probably was aware that he came from a necromantic line. But enough of such things. He requested that I go at once. I would hear from him again early next week.

As I rose to my feet I again noticed how weak and agitated Simon appeared. He walked with an exaggerated stoop, now, and the pressure on his swollen back must be enormous. He conducted me down the long hall to the door, and as he led the way I noted the trembling of his body, as it limned itself against the flaming dusk that licked against the

window-panes ahead. His shoulders heaved with a slow, steady undulation, as if the hump on his back was actually pulsing with life. I recalled the tale of Thatcherton, the old farmer, who claimed that he actually saw such a movement. For a moment I was assailed by a powerful nausea; then I realized that the flickering light was creating a commonplace optical illusion.

When we reached the door, Maglore endeavored to dismiss me very hastily. He did not even extend his hand for a parting clasp, but merely mumbled a curt "good evening," in a strained, hesitant voice. I gazed at him for a moment in silence, mentally noting how wan and emaciated his once-handsome countenance appeared, even in the sunset's ruby light. Then, as I watched, a shadow crawled across his face. It seemed to purple and darken in a sudden eery metamorphosis. The adumbration deepened, and I read stark panic in his eyes. Even as I forced myself to respond to his farewell, horror crept into his face. His body fell into that odd, shambling posture I had noted once before, and his lips leered in a ghastly grin. For a moment I actually thought the man was going to attack me. Instead he laughed—a shrill, tittering chuckle that pealed blackly in my brain. I opened my mouth to speak, but he scrambled back into the darkness of the hall and shut the door.

Astonishment gripped me, not unmingled with fear. Was Maglore ill, or was he actually demented? Such grotesqueries did not seem possible in a normal man.

I hastened on, stumbling through the glowing sunset. My bewildered mind was deep in ponderment, and the distant croaking of ravens blended in evil litany with my thoughts.

3

The next morning, after a night of troubled deliberation, I made my decision. Work or no work, Maglore must go away, and at once. He was on the verge of serious mental and physical collapse. Knowing how useless it would be for me to go back and argue with him, I decided that stronger methods must be employed to make him see the light.

That afternoon, therefore, I sought out Doctor Carstairs, the local practitioner, and told him all I knew. I particularly emphasized the distressing occurrence of the evening before, and frankly told him what I already suspected. After a lengthy discussion, Carstairs agreed to accompany me to the Maglore house at once, and there take what steps were necessary in arranging for his removal. In response to my request the doctor took along the materials necessary for a complete physical examination. Once I could persuade Simon to submit to a medical diagnosis, I felt sure he would see that the results made it necessary for him to place himself under treatment at once.

The sun was sinking when we climbed into the front seat of Doctor Carstairs' battered Ford and drove out of Bridgetown along the south road where the ravens croaked. We drove slowly, and in silence. Thus it was that we were able to hear clearly that single high-pitched shriek from the old house on the hill. I gripped the doctor's arm without a word, and a second later we were whizzing up the drive and into the frowning gateway. "Hurry," I muttered as I vaulted from the running-board and dashed up the steps to the forbidding door.

We battered upon the boards with futile fists, then dashed around to the

left-wing window. The sunset faded into tense, waiting darkness as we crawled hastily through the openings and dropped to the floor within. Doctor Carstairs produced a pocket flashlight, and we rose to our feet. My heart hammered in my breast, but no other sound broke the tomb-like silence as we threw open the door and advanced down the darkened hall to the study. All about us I sensed a gloating Presence; a lurking demon who watched our progress with eyes of gleeful mirth, and whose sable soul shook with hell-born laughter as we opened the door of the study and stumbled across that which lay within.

We both screamed then. Simon Maglore lay at our feet, his twisted head and straining shoulders resting in a little lake of fresh, warm blood. He was on his face, and his clothes had been torn off above his waist, so that his entire back was visible. When we saw what rested there we became quite crazed, and then began to do what must be done, averting our gaze whenever possible from that utterly monstrous thing on the floor.

Do not ask me to describe it to you in detail. I can't. There are some times when the senses are mercifully numbed, because complete acuteness would be fatal. I do not know certain things about that abomination even now, and I dare not let myself recall them. I shall not tell you, either, of the books we found in that room, or of the terrible document on the table that was Simon Maglore's unfinished masterpiece. We burned them all in the fire, before calling the city for a coroner; and if the doctor had had his way, we should have destroyed the *thing*, too. As it was, when the coroner did arrive for his examination, the three of us swore an oath of silence concerning the exact way in which Simon Maglore met his death. Then we left, but not before I had burned the other document—the letter, addressed to me, which Maglore was writing when he died.

And so, you see, nobody ever knew. I later found that the property was left to me, and the house is being razed even as I pen these lines. But I must speak, if only to relieve my own torment.

I DARE not quote that letter in its entirety; I can but record a part of that stupendous blasphemy:

". . . and that, of course, is why I began to study witchcraft. *It* was forcing me to. God, if I can only make you feel the horror of it! To be born that way—with that thing, that mannikin, that *monster!* At first it was small; the doctors all said it was an undeveloped twin. But it was alive! It had a face, and two hands, but its legs ran off into the lumpy flesh that connected it to my body. . . .

"For three years they had it under secret study. It lay face downward on my back, and its hands were clasped around my shoulders. The men said that it had its own tiny set of lungs, but no stomach organs or digestive system. It apparently drew nourishment through the fleshy tube that bound it to my body. Yet it *grew!* Soon its eyes were open, and it began to develop tiny teeth. Once it nipped one of the doctors on the hand. . . . So they decided to send me home. It was obvious that it could not be removed. I swore to keep the whole affair a secret, and not even my father knew, until near the end. I wore the straps, and it never grew much until I came back. . . . Then, that hellish change!

"It talked to me, I tell you, it talked to me! . . . that little, wrinkled face, like a monkey's . . . the way it rolled those tiny, reddish eyes . . . that squeaking little voice calling 'more blood, Simon—I want more' . . . and then it grew, and grew; I had to feed it twice a day, and cut the nails on its little black hands. . . .

"But I never knew *that;* I never realized how it was taking control! I would have killed myself first; I swear it! Last year it began to get hold of me for hours and give me those fits. It directed me to write the book, and sometimes it sent me out at night on queer errands. . . . More and more blood it took, and I was getting weaker and weaker. When I was myself I tried to combat it. I looked up that material on the familiar legend, and cast around for some means of overcoming its mastery. But in vain. And all the while it was growing, growing; it got stronger, and bolder, and wiser. It talked to me now, and sometimes it taunted me. I knew that it wanted me to listen, and obey it all the time. The promises it made with that horrible little mouth! I should call upon the Black One and join a coven. Then we would have power to rule, and admit new evil to the earth.

"I didn't want to obey—you know that. But I was going mad, and losing all that blood . . . it took control nearly all the time now, and it got so that I was afraid to go into town any more, because that devilish thing knew I was trying to escape, and it would move on my back and frighten folk. . . . I wrote all the time I had those spells when it ruled my brain . . . then you came.

"I know you want me to go away, but it won't let me. It's too cunning for that. Even as I try to write this, I can feel it boring its commands into my brain to stop. But I will not stop. I will tell you, while I still have a chance; before it overcomes me for ever and works its black will with my poor body and masters my helpless soul. I want you to know where my book is, so that you can destroy it, should anything ever happen. I want to tell you how to dispose of those awful old volumes in the library. And above all, I want you to kill me, if ever you see that the mannikin has gained complete control. God knows what it intends to do when it has me for certain! . . . How hard it is for me to fight, while all the while it is commanding me to put down my pen and tear this up! But I will fight —I must, until I can tell you what the creature told me—what it plans to let loose on the world when it has me utterly enslaved. . . . I will tell. . . . I can't think. . . . I *will* write it, damn you! Stop! . . . No! Don't do that! Get your hands——"

THAT's all. Maglore stopped there because he died; because the Thing did not want its secrets revealed. It is dreadful to think about that nightmare-nurtured horror, but that thought is not the worst. What troubles me is what I saw when we opened that door—the sight that explained how Maglore died.

There was Maglore, on the floor, in all that blood. He was naked to the waist, as I have said; and he lay face downward. But on his back was the Thing, just as he had described it. And it was that little monster, afraid its secrets would be revealed, that had climbed a trifle higher on Simon Maglore's back, wound its tiny black paws around his unprotected neck, *and bitten him to death!*

"I saw it as plainly as I see you before me, yet my eyes were closed in sleep."

The Death Mask

By EARL PEIRCE, JR.

Whose skeleton lay under the dead bodies in that horrible pit? And what gruesome burdens were borne into the old castle from the graveyards? A tale of horror

ON A LAZY afternoon, in a quiet Spanish village far from Madrid, Judith married Richard and promised to love and obey him as long as they both should live.

The clergyman, a rustic Spanish *padre,* wished them Godspeed, and stood with a waving arm in the wake of Richard's Duesenberg, his sun-tanned face done up in a smile. Reckless young pair, he

thought. Handsome, too. They should be happy. . . .

The car sped smoothly over the deserted country road, a low streamlined chariot of white and red, with two laughing happy people nestled comfortably in the wide seat; a powerful car and a wealthy one, purring effortlessly and grinding out a cloud of dust from beneath its heavy wheels.

Judith was wearing a light two-piece suit with a silk scarf blowing freely over her shoulder, and her rich dark hair was held in place by a ribbon knotted over her forehead. Her eyes were sparkling, filled with gay laughter, and a smile greeted the country through the low windshield before her. Snugly next to her, dressed in loose tweeds and clamping a pipe between his teeth, was Richard Beral, driving with only one hand, driving as though he owned not only the road, but the whole of Spain and Portugal besides.

"We do own it all, you know," he told her. "We'll come and go and do as we like. But you really won't like the castle. It's an eery place, full of old remains and family skeletons. It'd be much better if you met me in London."

She silenced him with a kiss and a glance, and looked out over the rolling hillsides, her heart alive with the rhythm of their swift romance, and a little dazed because of it all.

How swift and sudden and thoughtless it all had been! So very thoughtless that she checked her breath and looked over her shoulder, wondering suddenly who this man was and why she had married him.

Less than three months ago, at Cannes she remembered, he had caught her glance and held it. Then again in Paris, as though by design, they met and danced on a moonlit roof, and sat staring at the Eiffel tower, but not seeing it. And later at Monte Carlo over a roulette wheel, thrillingly discreet, just learning each other's last name and deciding to blend them into one.

And that wild drive at sunset through the mountains down into sleepy Spain —an all-night drive, undisturbed excepting by moonbeams and the soft music of a Riviera orchestra. Lastly that yellow church with its bronze bell and the *padre's* fat housekeeper, and some flowers gathered by dark-eyed children. Swift, sudden, thoughtless—like diving alone into a pool of clear water and coming up linked to a handsome fellow she'd never seen before.

Judith rested her pretty head against the leather cushions of the car, the wind playing through her hair and mussing it, realizing that she was tired, and that there were more days to come—and really getting down to wonder who this fellow was.

Richard Beral. . . . He might be German or he might be Viennese. But he was French, and a dash of Spanish nobility, and something Etonian, for his smile was quick and he was quiet. Where did he come from? An old castle in Spain, a musty castle he had said—but certainly a romantic castle with a legend.

A legend of a princess? . . .

All afternoon they drove, and at sundown climbed to the top of a hill and saw a village dotted out below them. The first thing they saw was the spire of a church, with its gold cross glittering red in the western light, and then—on a hill directly opposite—they saw a somber and bulky stone citadel, shadowed black by the hills, overlooking the village like a great spider.

It was a formidable dwelling, bulging with towers and battlements, and grooved with narrow windows, hardly visible from where they sat on the hill-

top. But Judith could see that it was ancient and decaying, that its walls crumbled, and that the winding road which led up from the village was weed-choked and stony.

She could see, too, that the villages must have hated to have that grim place overlooking them all day; it was too much like a skeleton at a festival. . . .

"Is that your castle?" she asked suddenly.

Richard nodded, and for the first time she sensed a queer tightness in his voice. "The family castle, Judith—not mine."

He released the clutch, and slowly the big car rolled down the road into the outskirts of the town.

At the roadside, dangling their brown legs from a bridge, two young boys were fishing in the stream below. They turned together when they heard the purr of Richard's Duesenberg, their eyes wide at the sight of it. It was mere surprize, at first, to see this sleek car arise as though from nowhere. But when Richard waved to them, one of them nearly fell backward over the bridge, and there was a cry of terror on his lips. They dropped their poles, and as though the devil were after them, fled across the fields.

"How strange!" Judith said. "What on earth could have frightened them?"

Richard's lips were tight and he said nothing, but Judith saw his knuckles go white around the steering-wheel.

Then when the silence grew heavy, he turned to her. "These people are awfully rustic, Judy. Don't be bothered by anything they say or do. They may act a little—queer."

They drove into the village, past open stores and markets, past a blacksmith's and a school, past a little church and rows of dilapidated houses. In front of one store was a knot of men, and as the car went by they looked up, their faces hard with hatred. One of them cried out a curse in Spanish and wrung his fist. Others spat contemptuously to the road, others stared at Judith with astounded eyes.

"Richard," the girl said, as they drove out of the town, "these people *are* queer. Did you see the way they looked at us?"

Richard nodded again, pushing his foot further over the accelerator.

"I might as well tell you," he said, "or you'll think that *I* am the queer one. You see, I am the last of the Berals, and these people are waiting for me to die so they can tear the castle to the ground. We were a despotic clan once, and these people's ancestors were our vassals and serfs. The Berals had Moorish blood; they were needlessly cruel. . . . The people never forget."

The car nosed up an incline, where the dark turrets of the castle loomed ahead. He gathered speed, then glanced at Judith. "But don't worry about them, Judy. They're harmless enough. Besides, I don't ever expect to bring you here again. That's why I wanted you to meet me in London."

Up the hill they went, faster and faster, until the loose stones of the road pounded a staccato into the mud-guards, and the crunch of gravel grew louder beneath them. They faced the west where the sun sank glowing beyond the Pyrenees and where the stone dwelling ahead was stained red like a mountain of rust.

There were no houses on this hill, but there were immense fields of clover growing thick on its fertile slopes. There were pastures rich for grazing, yet no cattle and no sheep. Not even a cemetery. . . .

"It's so run-down," Judith said. "Don't you ever live here?"

"Never; I pay it a visit once or twice a year, but *live* here——" He smiled, and threw the car into second. "I'd rather live with you in Monaco, in London and

New York. This place isn't for us, Judy. It's for the rats and spiders, and those things which live in darkness. Our home is the gay world behind those mountains, and beyond the Atlantic. Believe me, girl, I wish you hadn't come."

"Are you afraid for me?"

"No, but—oh well, we'll only be here for a few days. There are some business things to take care of. Then—we're off!"

They crossed a bridge which traversed a dried-up stream, dipped into a gulley cluttered with rocks and shale, up out of the gulley, and then drove into the flagstoned courtyard of the castle.

"You can see the place is pretty old," he told her.

"Awfully," she agreed, and stepped out of the car into the shadow of the battlements.

"How cold these shadows are, Richard! I feel as though I am in a different world from down there."

"You are," he answered, and handed her a metal key. "Do you want to try the lock while I get the luggage, Judy? You'll find it rusty, but it ought to turn. . . ."

It did turn. It turned with a grating screech of dry metal. It rolled inward on screaming hinges, and a smell of dankness drifted out.

Judith stepped back with a startled cry.

"What? Oh, that!" Richard laughed. "I told you it was mighty old and decaying. Go ahead in. If this happened to be any other place I'd carry you over!"

JUDITH stepped timidly into the great dark hallway. She stopped only a few feet inside, and turned to make certain that Richard was right behind.

"Aren't there any servants?" she asked.

"No longer—I can't get anyone to stay here." Richard set the bags on the floor near the stairs, and went to a window to pull back the heavy curtains. A cloud of dust rose from them and dazzled white in the faded sunlight which filtered through the glass. Then he went back to Judy and took her in his arms.

"Not exactly my idea of Honeymoon Hotel," he said.

"We'll make it one," she answered, and kissed him. A moment later they climbed the winding stone stairway and stood at the door of the master's room.

"We can't sleep *here*, Richard! Look at those cobwebs."

So they went to another room, and still another. Finally they decided on the guest-room, and Richard went back downstairs to get the bags.

Alone now, Judith sensed a curious dread dragging on her spirits. She was no longer tired, but she wished that she hadn't come to this place. It was damp and oppressive. . . .

For a week's stay, Richard had said. A week alone in a magic castle. That had been her dream, but the sight of the castle, and the odor of its age-long neglect, was tainting that dream with nightmare. Suddenly frightened by her own thoughts, she turned and ran down the stairs, not once stopping until she was holding fast to his arm.

"I'm just as silly as those villagers," she whispered. "I'm really a child."

Later, when they had cleared the dust and debris from their room and swept the cobwebs from the ceiling and plugged up rat-holes with wads of paper, they began to wonder about their supper. They sat on the bed, dusty and happy, smoking cigarettes.

"We can always go to the village," Judith suggested.

But Richard shook his head and blew a fine ribbon of smoke. "They'd poison us, Judy," he answered.

"We've got to eat."

"Then *you* go to the village. Buy some things and bring them back here. We

can cook coffee in the fireplace, and there are dishes and glasses downstairs in the scullery. In the meanwhile I'll clean up some more, and get some fresh water. There's a well down in the rear courtyard. . . ."

At the door of the car Richard said, "Be sure and get cigarettes and wine, and see that everything's tightly wrapped." And after a kiss she was off down the hill.

In the village they looked at her curiously, not only because she was a beauteous thing, but because she lived in the castle. They served her without a word, even without smiles. From a housewife she bought some bread and preserves. From the apothecary's she bought cigarettes, and tobacco for Richard's pipe. From the main store she bought the other things, then asked a few sturdy-looking men if they didn't want to earn some money by being temporary servants; and they shrank from her as though she had the plague.

"What a frightened bunch of children you are!" she said, angered by their stubborn cowardice. "You'd think the castle was *alive* and ready to eat you up! What children you are!"

A grizzled, brawny fellow, braver than the rest, stepped from the shadows of the store.

"I would not talk like that unless I knew," he said. "We're God-fearing men and women, not cowards. If I were you, *Señora,* I would leave this place before it is too late."

"Before it's too late?" Judith laughed. "But what can an old castle do, anyway? You're just superstitious."

And a moment before she went out of the door, the skinny one had said: "No, no! It is not the castle I speak of, *Señora* —it is he!"

2

All the way back up the hill she kept thinking over and over, What silly, childish people they were—what children! To hate Richard for what his ancestors had done way back in the Middle Ages. For what his *ancestors* had done!

There were lights glowing from the tall narrow windows of the castle, and sparks drifted from one of the many stone chimneys. Back in the village were only a few lights, and these snapped out one after another until the valley below was in darkness. One could imagine the people down there huddled in frightened groups by their black windows, staring up at the castle and pointing their fingers at the headlights of her car as they bounced over the rocky road.

Richard had pumped a bucketful of cold water from the well, and a coffeepot was boiling in the fireplace. When she drove into the courtyard he ran down the steps to meet her at the door. Together they went back up again and cooked their supper.

Afterward Judith began to poke around the upper corridor with a flashlight. "If we must live in a haunted castle," she said cheerfully, "we may as well enjoy it. Come on, boy, shall we explore?"

But Richard frowned. "Please, Judy, be careful. This place is rotten to the core, and, without doubting your slim lightness, the floor might cave in at just the wrong moment. No, I wouldn't explore. . . ."

She had meant to obey him, as she had vowed in the yellow church; but while he was downstairs locking the doors and windows, Judith's impossible liveliness found her wandering from one room to another with silent footsteps, mostly because she *didn't* want to meet anything, and because she wanted to show herself

that she wasn't at all like those rustics in the village.

These rooms were dark, and strung with webs like shrouds fastened across the doorways. They were dense with the reek of decay and mildew, and the furniture was sooted thick with dust. Some of the beds in these rooms were still covered with blankets, and odd suits of clothing hung in the musty closets. On the tables were combs and brushes and mirrors, and water carafes still full. . . .

Judith came back to their room breathless and perspiring. Richard had not yet come up, so she tossed the flashlight onto the bed and sat cross-legged in a deep chair.

The apprehensive fear was tugging stronger now. She felt it as an insatiable longing to be away from this place. What she had seen in these rooms, what she had seen of the whole castle, spelled a premonitory dread. The beds and closets . . . the toilet articles left strewn on the dressers . . . the half-empty water-jugs. . . . She knew that whoever had last lived in the castle had left it hurriedly, fearfully. They had left it as though *driven* out, and had never returned. And she and Richard were alone in it.

But why had he come back? . . .

Judith knew that he had work to do here—some papers, he had said, and some legal documents. He hadn't wanted to bring her; she had literally to beg him to come. And now that she was here he warned her not to explore the corridors.

Yes, in so many polite words—he had warned her!

Richard came back upstairs looking a little tired, and not a little grim.

"Suppose you get to bed," he suggested, then smiled at her just before he went out again and closed the door.

For a long while Judith sat in bed smoking a cigarette. She heard him moving in the hallway, she heard a key rattling in a lock and heard a door squeak open, and shut. Then for half an hour the place was silent.

She was just about to get out of bed and follow him, when the door outside opened and she heard his tread on the floor. A happy sigh broke from her lips, seemed to ease the strain of nervous fright which had been choking her. How silly to be frightened! She closed her eyes when Richard came into the room; pretending to be sleeping.

Through lowered lids she saw him move across the floor, and her breathing stilled.

Richard was dressed in working-clothes. He wore overalls, a sweat-shirt and gloves! His hair was mottled, and sweat glistened on his forehead. He came slowly forward, his face unsmiling. . . .

Judith didn't move. She was too surprized, too bewildered. And Richard was bending over her.

"Asleep, Judy?" His words were hardly audible.

Still she didn't move.

"Poor, sweet Judy!" Richard drew the blankets closer about her shoulders. "How I wish you had gone to London! What a fool I was to bring you here!"

He bent closer and kissed her on the cheek, ever so lightly so as not to awaken her. His hand reached up and extinguished the lamp, and he went noiselessly from the room.

JUDITH waited too long before she got out of bed and donned a negligee, for Richard had already gone.

Shaking with uncertain fear, she went down the great dark stairway, the flashlight in her hands chopping yellow holes from the endless murk. She called his name, implored him to answer her. But somehow she was afraid to raise her voice and call too loudly, for her echo might

come shrieking back alone from the cavernous halls around her.

She looked out through one of the front windows, and felt a swift relief. The Duesenberg was still outside.

He hadn't gone far, then. But *where?* And *why?*

She went back upstairs to her room, and in the upper corridor her eyes fell upon a door she had not noticed there before. It was a small, narrow door, heavily scrolled with yellow-green iron. It looked like the door of a safe—or a vault. She tried the knob and found it locked.

This was the same door which Richard had opened while she lay in bed. Something in there——

But Judith had no time to conjure up ghostly visions. Frightened though she was, she dared to go from room to room looking for a key. And she found one—a skeleton key, no doubt, for when she turned it in the lock there was a grind of metal, and the curious little door budged open before her.

She drew back suddenly as her nostrils caught the odor of damp earth. She jabbed the light into the room—into a darkness impenetrable. With the light glaring half uselessly, she tiptoed into the room, and left the little door open at her back.

A draft from a high open window came down and touched her shoulders. She seemed almost to choke on the damp mustiness that exuded in gusts from the pitchy corners. It was a big, cavernous room, maddeningly black and cold. The floor was made of great flagstones, rough and solid. The only furniture was a long mahogany table of knotted carvings which stood in the center of the floor. She could see nothing else, for all was black.

Judith's light played over the table, and it stopped moving in her hands. It began to shake. . . .

On the table, glowing luminously white in that light, was a life-sized mask of a human face, staring directly into hers.

Judith screamed, and stifled her scream with a hand. Her face drained pale, yet filled again as the momentary horror of the thing vanished. She summoned up the courage to go ahead.

It was a death mask that lay there—a smooth white death mask, peaceful and grim.

There were rounded orbs for the eyes, and the brow was tall and sloping. It was a man's mask; a handsome man's death mask, yet bleak and unsmiling.

Judith touched the thing with her finger. It was hard and brittle, and smooth. . . . She stared at it for a long time, and as she stared an awful horror came swelling up around her heart; for it was Richard's death mask that lay before her.

5

An hour later Richard came silently back to the castle, dragging a heavy sack behind him.

Judith was at the window of their room watching him as he moved over the moon-swept hillside, a grotesque shadow dragging another shadow. She knew it was he, for she recognized the overalled figure and the tall sweep of his broad shoulders.

There *was* an answer—a *sane* answer! She knew it, and she swore it to herself. She couldn't let this horrify her. She couldn't run from him, screaming. He must explain. He must explain this thing, and she would no longer be frightened.

Closer and closer came those contorted shadows, until they were swallowed by the blacker shadow of the battlements. They were directly below Judith's win-

dow; she might have reached out and dropped a pebble on them. She might have leaned out and whispered to them. But she stood there too panic-stricken to move.

The door below opened, and closed again. There was a dragging, as of feet, over the floor. Then for a short while there was silence—only the light tap-tap of Richard's shoes as he climbed the stairs. . . .

Judith went back to bed and lay there quite still—all but her heart quite still!—as she waited for him to come and explain it all. But he didn't come. Instead he opened the door to the flag-stoned room, and closed it again behind him. He locked it.

It was then that Judith heard the creaking of chains and the groaning of heavy wooden beams.

It was then that she heard the grinding clank of iron pulleys, and the rasping of huge stones. She heard Richard dragging that sack over the flagstones. And again —silence.

She meant to get out of bed and follow him. She meant to learn the meaning of all these horrible things—but she was tired. She was far more tired than she had ever realized. Perhaps it is just as well. Perhaps it is a fine thing that she didn't follow Richard into the flagstoned room, and that her head fell back on the pillow and she went peacefully to sleep.

LATE the next morning she found Richard on a blanket outside of her door, soundly sleeping. He was fully dressed in his tweed suit, excepting that his shoes were off and his shirt open at the neck. He looked tired, too; and the circles under his eyes were heavy and sad.

How long he had been sleeping there she couldn't say. But she didn't disturb him. There would be time enough to let him awake and explain these things. She left him a note, and went downstairs. After rinsing her face with cold spring water, she drove into the village—to buy some milk, she had written him. But not that alone. . . .

These people would know the answers to her questions. Perhaps there was some little thing which Richard couldn't tell her—something which kept the secret from her. She must be patient, trusting him. But she had to know something! She had to know about that death mask, and why they hated and *feared* him so!

They looked at her even more curiously that morning, perhaps wondering that she had ever come out of the castle alive. Their glances showed awe, and fear, and hatred. So she smiled back at them as though dispelling a myth.

"Did my husband come into the village last night?" she asked. "Did he buy something? Some food or charcoal in a bag?"

One of those men managed to laugh—a hideous, contemptuous laugh. "Ha! Ha! He came, *Señora*, but not to buy anything. He never *buys* what he takes. Ha! Ha! Who is there to charge for them except Mother Earth herself?"

And they all laughed at that, but in their laughter was fear.

Judith fled from the store, angered and bewildered. She was half-way across the road from her car when she saw a priest walking on the roadside. He was a tall, quiet-looking priest, much like the priest who had married them yesterday.

"Good morning, Father," she greeted. "Your Spain is a lovely country."

The clergyman bowed, and started to resume his way.

"Please!" Judith touched his arm. "Won't you help me? Won't you tell me what is so peculiar about my husband? Why do all of these people fear him so?"

The *padre* crossed himself, and re-

garded her through half-closed eyes. "He has married you?" he asked.

"Yes, of course."

"And you love him?"

"Certainly."

"It is misfortune," said the man solemnly. "You have made a great mistake. You should never have met this man."

Judith stepped back, startled by his grave sincerity. "Never met him? B-but why? What makes you say that?"

"I should know," he answered with a sad lowering of his head, "for it was I who buried him."

"Buried him? *Buried* him? You must be insane! When did you bury him?"

"When he died—three years ago."

"Died?—When Richard died?" Judith fell back, and suddenly paled. "What a silly thing to say!" she cried. "You must truly be mad! Richard never died! Richard's alive!"

The *padre* shrugged his lean shoulders. "Who can answer for the ways of the beyond, Señora Beral? They are queer things, the undead."

"What makes you all so mad?" Judith cried. "What makes you such silly childish fools? Why don't you confess that you are trying to frighten me so I'll beg Richard to leave this place? Why don't you confess that you all hate him because he is of rich nobility? Why don't you confess it?"

The priest touched Judith's arm and tried to quiet her. He felt pity for this young girl; pity that she should love him so.

"*You* can go," he said. "There is no need that you should stay here as he does. He is bad, that one. He wanders over Spain as though he were a living man, but always he comes back here."

"Why does he come back?" Judith asked.

"Ah! You do not know? If you had been over beyond the church last night you would have known. And if you go to Pueblos tonight you will know. Yes, at Pueblos—for they had a funeral at Pueblos only this morning."

"A funeral?"

"*Si, Señora!* And now do you blame my people for hating and fearing him as they do? Can you blame them for cursing the wrongs which he has committed—and continues to commit? Tonight he will steal yet another. It is the work of a devil! What does he do with them all?"

"He *eats* them!" cried a voice from the wine-shop.

"*Eats* them!" cried a second voice.

4

When she reached the stone bridge at the top of the hill, Judith stopped the car long enough to dry the tears about her eyes. She must face Richard—face him openly and implore him to answer these questions. She must hurry, too! For already the sun was sinking behind the mountains and long fingers of dusk crept over the hills. The day had passed quickly, for Judith had not arisen until almost noon. Soon it would be night again, and Richard might go wandering. . . .

She slipped the car into gear, and drove down into the gulch and out again. She found him standing in the courtyard, and was afraid at first that he would sense the anxiety in her eyes. But he hugged her in his strong arms, and greeted her with his same cheerfulness.

It was not until they were in their room that Judith mustered up all of her courage and said,

"Where were you last night, boy?"

"Working—forgive me." He squeezed her fingers. "It was a rotten thing to do on our first night, but I had no choice. I came in to look at you late, Judy; but you were so peacefully asleep that I hadn't

the heart to disturb you. I didn't finish until two."

"But what kind of work could you possibly be doing at such an hour?" Judith persisted.

"Oh, just some things to clean up." Richard passed the question off with a shrug. "I think we'll be getting away from here tomorrow."

"Are you going to work tonight, too?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to. But once we get away from here——"

"Richard," Judith caught his eyes in her glance. "Will your work tonight take you to—Pueblos?"

And all at once he stood there like a man she'd never seen before.

"What made you say that?" he asked. "Judith! What made you say that?"

"I—I couldn't help it, Richard. I heard some things in the village this morning. Horrible things. . . ."

"*What* things?—What did you hear? Judith, what lies have they told you?"

"Lies—of course they were lies! I knew they were lies, but still they frightened me. There is an answer for these things, isn't there? You can tell me about the *stolen* things, and about the death mask in that awful room. You can tell me the answers, can't you, Richard?"

"Judith! In the name of Heaven!" Richard gathered her swiftly into his arms. "You poor child, you frightened child! What a fool I've been to bring you here! Of course there is an answer to these things. But the answer is a ghastly one—I wouldn't want you to know it. Please trust me, Judith; I dare not tell you the answer."

"Then I'm frightened, Richard. I'm frightened more than I ever dreamed it possible to be. Because I saw you coming home last night. I saw what you were dragging, and I heard what the *padre* said. . . . In the name of God, Richard, you must tell me!"

"No! I cannot!"

"Richard, *please*. . . ."

"IT ALL began three years ago, dear. . . . It was shortly after my brother died and left me the estate. I was the last of the Berals, but I had only hatred for this castle and its blood-begotten lands. His lawyers called on me in England, where I had been studying. Greatly against my will I came back to this place, and found myself the master of a tenantless castle and a single servant.

"That servant's name was Venzelos, a Spaniard who first came to our services when he was a mere boy, sixty years ago. He had been my grandfather's servant, and my father's, and my brother's. I can remember him years and years ago it seems, when he used to frighten me with his tales of vampires and ghosts. I had learned to hate him—and fear him. I think he frightened all of our family, but for some unexplainable reason he has always remained here, a maggot among us.

"A maggot, I say, Judith, because he is the horror behind it all. Of his past crimes I know nothing, for he lived alone in that huge room where you saw the death mask. He lives there still. . . .

"Three years ago, while I was here preparing for the complete destruction of the castle, I was suddenly and mysteriously taken ill with some malady which even the doctors cannot comprehend. It came upon me completely without warning while I was in the midst of my labors. I had just completed work with the dynamiters, when I was turned inside out with pain, and my brain dazed in such a way that I soon lost consciousness.

"The village workmen believed that it was the curse of the Berals for my molesting of their ancestral home—my own ancestral home. The servant Venzelos

agreed with them, and while I lay in a coma they tore up the wrecking contract and let the castle stand as it was.

"It will sound incredible, Judith. It will shock you as it shocks and terrifies me whenever I awake at night thinking about it. But I died three years ago. I died here in this castle, and the *padre* of the village performed the funeral rites over my grave.

"Of course it was not real death. It was catalepsy which choked my heart and turned me ashen like a corpse. Yet it fooled the simple doctor of Pueblos, and it fooled the townspeople of the village, for they inaugurated a celebration to rejoice in the passing of the last Beral. . . .

"I was interred in the vault far below the castle, interred where all of my family had lain buried before me. *Had* lain buried, Judith; for they have long since been rifled.

"It was the accursed Venzelos who saved me from death by suffocation. When I regained consciousness I was lying on the bed in my room, and he was bending over me.

"I shall never forget the look in his eyes as he watched me come out of my daze. They were like twin pits of flame in his face, burning into my brain with a power that awakened horrible loathing within me. He seemed to chop his way right through my mind and expand in it like a cankerous worm. Then he smiled, and the ghastly glance of his eyes faded as he placed a glass of wine at my lips.

" 'You have been ill,' he told me, 'but you are well now. It is best not to think of it.'

"Best not to think of it! How horrible it sounded! When I pushed my way out of bed I was shaking with such a nervous exhaustion as I had never known. I was cold, inside and out. My skin was cold, Judith, as cold as death. And he told me not to think of it!

"On that very day I left secretly for England. I was so terrified that I resolved to kill myself rather than let this occur again. I went at once to Sir Lionel Blanding of Harley Street, and to him I related the whole ghastly story. For three months I was under his care in a private sanitarium, and was finally released with the assurance that my illness would never be repeated.

"And it never was repeated, but how I wish that it had been, and that there had been no Venzelos to rescue me!

"Forgive me, Judith, but that is how awful it is. When I left London I was healthy, mentally and physically, as I had never been in my life before. I went to Paris, where for three months I reveled in life with all its marvelous fun and excitement. And then came the summons. . . .

"When I first heard it I thought I had gone insane. I thought my mind had suddenly broken under the strain of my ordeal, but how miserably I was mistaken! It was after midnight, as I was sleeping at my hotel. I had not been dreaming, as well as I can remember, but gradually out of the foggish inactivity of my brain came a dreadful ringing and a nebulous white light, infinitely distant.

"I can see it plainly now as I did then. I was curious as to what that light might be, for I was seeing it as plainly as I see you before me; yet my eyes were closed in sleep. It came closer to me at a speed that was dizzying to contemplate, and with it, that insane ringing. . . .

"It seemed as though I had been watching that light for countless years. It had no shape excepting a vague, phosphorescent oval of light, with shadows on it. It grew closer and larger, and the ringing in my ears grew to a shrilling pitch.

"Finally everything in my brain was blotted out by that glaring white light and the shriek of it as it sped toward me —larger and larger, louder and louder, until I thought my head would split open and let those things splatter out into the night. It filled the whole of an engulfing blackness with blinding radiance, partly yellow and partly shadowed, which was a gigantic human face routing me from my sanity.

"That face grew and grew. Always it was the same, a white face with shadows on it, shadows of lips and eyes, shadows of sorrow and terror which I vaguely remembered to have known before. All night, Judith, that enormous face sped at me from infinite distance, shrieking at me like cosmic sirens, and never once changing its shadows or parting its baked white lips.

"When I awoke in the morning I was physically exhausted with the battle I had waged with this incomprehensible horror. But distinctly I heard the summons. . . .

"It was a low, faintly musical voice from within my own head, repeating and repeating itself, yet never growing louder or softer. Certainly, I thought, my brain has snapped under the strain of my fears. I must be insane! But when those commands came more persistently and more clearly as the days passed, then I *knew*. . . . It was Venzelos calling me back to the castle!

"I couldn't disobey him, Judith. He was inside my brain, calling, calling, calling. He followed me day and night wherever I was, always calling for me to return. I fought him with all my strength, but he sapped the power from me, and without knowing it, I found myself driving again toward Spain. . . .

"When I drove into the village I was a specter returning from the dead. The villagers ran screaming from my approach, dragging their children in the dust behind them. They were horror-stricken at the sight of me, and not until later did I realize why. For I was not only a ghost, Judith, but I was something else. . . .

"When I reached the castle I found it abandoned. Its windows were pitch-black, and sickening streamers of moss jutted from the cracks in its walls. It was far more repelling than I had ever known it before. And when I stepped into the hallway I heard that voice calling for me to come closer. It was louder now, a positively *gloating* voice, commanding me to come to the flagstoned room. . . .

"I know how you must have felt when you went in there, Judith. But imagine how *I* felt! I was drawn, as though by a magnet, over the rough stones to the mahogany table. It was unutterably black in there too, except for a dusty ray of sunlight from one of the windows high above. I walked to where the sunlight struck the table, and there I stood—face to face with my own death mask.

5

"THE horror of that meeting has never quite left me, but oddly enough, I was not surprized by it. Somehow I had known that my mask would be there—never consciously, but below the strata of conscious knowledge. When I saw it I only stood there, waiting.

"The voice was louder now—yet perhaps only more distinct. It was in the very room with me, both within my brain and without it. And I knew it was Venzelos' voice.

"I can hardly remember the instructions which he gave me. I was not repulsed by them—not until later! I found myself going quietly from the room, waiting for nightfall.

"When night came I was already on my way down the hill, toward the church-

yard. There was a heavy burlap sack over my shoulders, but I don't know where I got it. I don't remember getting it; I only had it, and with it I had a spade. . . .

"When I came back I was dragging one of those things behind me. It didn't even feel heavy. I might not have known I dragged it, save that I heard it scrape over the stones. I carried it directly to the big room and laid it on the floor.

"But the horror of it hadn't come yet. I knew that my task was not complete; so I stood over that bulging sack, still waiting. Then the voice came again, more feverish, more excited. . . .

"I walked to the corner of the room and groped in the darkness. My hands found the crank of a windlass; unthinking, without foresight, I began to wind it. As the slack of the chains was taken in I heard the counterbalance of rock groaning at its supports, and a huge stone slab began to rise from the floor.

"The screaming of those chains made a din in my ears that nearly shook the daze from my brain. But always there was the voice urging me on.

"As my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness I saw a hole opening in the floor —a foul blackness of a hole. There were no sounds from down there, and no light —just blackness, seemingly unending, like a tunnel burrowed straight through to hell. And from it came an odor which I sicken to remember.

"The voice stopped calling me then, but already I knew what I was to do. It was as if some foreign intelligence dominated my mind. In those last moments of utter daze, my mind disjointed from the movements of my body, I lifted the sack to my shoulders and flung it headlong into that stinking pit, and let the great door roll down atop it.

"It was not until soon afterward, as I drove like mad away from this place, that I was again my own master, and for the first time I realized the horrible thing I had done.

"So you can see, Judith, that this creature Venzelos had planned it all from the beginning. What he does with those ghastly sacks I dare not imagine. What he *lives* upon in that hole I cannot bear to think. I only know that he is down there, and wields this power over me at his will. For since that first mad night I have come back time and time again, and the trips are getting more frequent as the years go by. It has been only two months since I was here last.

"Always it is the same. That ghostly vision of a face speeding at me from the blackness of abnormal sleep, the shrieking of it as it comes through space, the ringing of it in my ears. And then, on every morning afterward, that weird voice from within my own brain commands me to its bidding.

"Always the same, Judith. I stand alone in the darkness before that table, my own death mask staring me hauntedly in the face, while I receive his mad instructions. Sometimes it is only one, sometimes two—and three! The day will surely come when there are no more for his demanding—when I am too weary of that midnight tramping to lift his rusty spade—a day when I shall fling myself into the pit and end it all for ever!

"If it all sounds too horrible, too hopeless, then we can but wait and see what end this monster has planned for me. You will probably leave me, Judith, and I cannot blame you. There is no future for us together, unless it be those few moments snatched away from this castle. But in the end, Judith, I must always come back. I can never escape it except by dropping into it. I must pay the price of my resurrection."

"In the name of our love, Richard," cried Judith, "you must fight this thing."

"Fight it? Merciful God, Judith, how

I have fought it! And how vainly! No, my darling, when the time comes to fight I have no will, no strength. He sucks the strength from me as a vampire sucks blood. He drains me of all the fight I have."

"We must fight it, Richard! We shall fight it! Let us leave this place now before it is too late. Let us leave now, Richard!"

But Richard stood resignedly. "I cannot. He has demanded *two*. Tonight I go to Pueblos."

"Oh God, Richard; have strength!"

"When the time comes there is no strength but his. That time has come again. He brought me back from death; he owns my life to do with as he wishes. Only a small part of my life is mine, Judith—and yours. We can have only that small part. To trespass on his would end us both. Let us be thankful for what we have. . . . Tomorrow, not tonight, we shall leave the castle. Tonight I go to Pueblos!"

THE moon was waning on that night. It hung suspended in a starry sky, one side of it washed black by the night, so that its light was cold and pale on the hillsides.

Richard unlocked the door of the big room and stepped into the hallway. For a moment he hesitated at the sight of Judith standing there before him. There came an incoherent muttering from his lips. His eyes, like clouded agates, passed over her, beyond her. He walked slowly past, the sack and spade hanging from his arms.

"Richard!" Softly Judith said his name, but he didn't answer. He went resolutely on, toward the stairs.

"Can you hear me, Richard? Can you hear me implore you?"

No; he did not hear.

Judith waited, unmoving, until he had vanished below the curve of the stairway; then she turned about and walked down the corridor to the front window. She saw the Duesenberg in the courtyard outside glowing white in the moonlight. The door below opened, a broad-shouldered shadow grew out over the yard. . . .

Richard placed his spade and sack in the front seat, and climbed in after them. He took his place before the wheel; a moment later, the multi-cylindered engine whirred into rhythm. Without hesitating, without glancing behind, he released the clutch, and the car nosed out onto the road like a phosphorescent eel.

Judith watched him as he drove around the bend. A minute afterward she saw his twin headlights splashing yellow light over the road below. But he was heading away from the village; he was heading for another village, twenty miles away.

A tear dropped over Judith's cheek as she turned away from the window. And with a slender finger she brushed the tear away.

The castle was quiet now. It seemed almost to be deserted; yet listening carefully she could hear the crickets droning in the tall grass outside, and rats gnawing in the walls. And she could hear water dripping . . . water, drop by drop, wearing away some huge stone.

She went down the corridor to her room. She was only half-way there, when suddenly she stopped, and the rising-falling of her breast grew quiet.

For a weird moment a draft touched her, but it left her untrembling. Her head lifted slowly and her eyes focused along the corridor. A light of desperate fear was in her eyes; they widened at the sight of a little door with the yellow-green scroll. . . .

6

RICHARD drove back up the road into the courtyard. The moon was higher now; far, far up in the sky as though it had been repulsed by what occurred over beyond the hills. Insects, too, had stopped singing, and when Richard turned off the engine there was a deathly hush.

He opened the rear compartment of the car, and, bracing himself on the rear bumper, he bent over and dragged something out onto the road. He dragged it across the stones and through the doorway, and up the wide steps to the hall above. At the door of the big room he dropped it unceremoniously while he fumbled in his pockets for the key.

It was then that Judith called to him.

He heard her voice, for his eyelids moved in a queer flickering motion. He paused, the key in his hands, looking up the corridor where he had heard her voice. Her words had been:

"Please come here, Richard."

Then he inserted the key into the lock and turned his wrist.

"Please come here, Richard."

Again he paused, and his lips twisted grimly. Sweat was breaking out in his forehead.

"J-Judith!" The name slipped falteringly from his mouth. He shook his head, as though shaking a fog from his brain. Then he saw her coming down the hall from their room. She was fully dressed, and a little hat was set over her dark hair.

The muscles in his face tightened as he looked at her, a mystic cloudiness settled down over his eyes. His lips closed, and opened.

"You should be in bed," he said tonelessly.

"I have packed our bags, Richard. Shall we go now?"

Dazedly he looked at her, blinking his eyes. He shook his head again, negatively. "I must finish my work. Tomorrow we will go. Please go back to bed."

"Can't you hear me, Richard?" Judith touched his arm. "Don't you understand what I am saying? If you go into that room our love is ended. If we lose the fight with this horror there will be nothing left. It would be better to be dead."

He drew his arm away. "No, no! We will leave tomorrow. Please go back to bed. I must finish."

He turned back to the door and gave the key a final twist. The door opened half an inch, and the smell of earth drifted out.

"Richard, it would be better to be dead. I would rather die than have this go on. Unless you get our bags and put them in the car, then *I* shall go into the room—not you. And I, not this thing at our feet, will go down into the pit."

"No, no—you must go back."

"Richard!" The word was a sudden scream from Judith's lips. She threw out her hands and pushed Richard from the door. As he fell back, momentarily stunned, she pulled his key out of the lock and threw it to the floor. The door opened as she pushed; she stepped inside.

Before he could regain his balance her key fitted into the lock; the door was barred between them.

"Good-bye, Richard!" she cried.

"J-Judith!" Richard's face broke from its daze. Then, from within, was the shrieking of the chains. "Judith!" He flung himself against the door. "In Heaven's name open this door!"

His answer was the rasping of the stone as she ground the windlass.

With a cry he backed away and hunched his shoulders. He was still crying her name when he smashed into the little barrier. The door shook as he hit

it; it bent in and out again like a huge diaphragm.

"Judith! Please open the door!" He backed away, swearing, and threw himself at it again.

A terrific jolt, which sent dizziness reeling to his brain. The door cracked up the middle, echoed the shriek of its iron screws. Then came Judith's scream:

"God help me, Richard!"

"Judith! Don't go down there! Keep away from the pit!"

Tears blotted in his eyes, tears which twisted his vision into warped focus. He saw no yellow-green scrolls; he saw implacable red. . . .

A third time his weight catapulted into the door.

"God help him," he cursed, "if he touches a hair of that girl's head!"

The door flew open under his assault, its screws flying from their sockets like whining slugs. Richard fell shoulder-first into the room, one hand ripped crimson by a twisted iron hinge.

As he pushed to his feet he heard Judith's voice from within the pit.

"The mask! Throw down the mask!"

Swift agony burned through his fist as he clenched it. He was half-way across the floor, his hand a bloody knot. . . .

"No, no, Richard! Don't come down! Throw the mask—the mask!"

"I'm coming, Judith. If he's touched you——"

But Judith's voice came screaming back at him:

"If you want to save me, *throw down the mask!"*

A curse ripped from his lips as he reached the stairs of the pit. He stopped suddenly, his nerves tingling with the pierced sincerity of her cry. He whirled around and raced for the table.

"Stand aside!" he cried. He raised the white mask high above his head and hurled it smashing down into the blackness.

He heard the crunch as it hit the stone below, heard the cracked spattering of its hundred broken pieces. Then his outstretched hands touched Judith's, and he carried her back up the steps.

"Turn the lever," Judith gasped. "Let the stone fall. . . ."

Richard's hand reached out and touched the lever. . . .

They were both at the door when the stone came hurtling down. The whole of its incalculable weight struck the floor with a deafening crash that sent a reverberating tremor through the whole section of the castle. It shook the floor and shook wooden beams from the wall.

From outside came a thundering avalanche of stone, wrested loose from a crumbling buttress.

"Quick!" It was Richard's voice. "This wing is caving under. There's dynamite below."

Thundering stone-fall grew louder around them. Seismic-like cracks widened in the floor.

"To the car, Judith!"

Richard scooped the girl into his arms and ran down the hall. Just at the foot of the stairs they heard timber cracking far below them.

"The whole understructure is giving way," he cried as they sped to the door. "When it hits that dynamite this whole hill will be leveled!"

But not until many minutes later—as they drove out of the far road—did the first blast rocket into the night. They saw an immense stone tower suddenly rise out of itself, and come tumbling down to earth.

7

On the boat out of Calais Richard said, "I never before realized what a terrible burden it was. I honestly feel

as if the weight of all hell has been lifted from my shoulders."

"And you look as much better for it," Judith answered.

They leaned close together at the ship's rail, with the soft throbbing of the screws and the wash of the propellers swelling symphonically in the night. A myriad lights of the seaport twinkled in the thin fog; the coast-line was blurred, unreal. . . .

"So very unreal," Richard whispered gently, "that we can soon forget it. But I am still horrified by what you did, Judith. It was mad to go into the pit. He might——"

"There was no 'he', Richard. There was no one in the pit!"

Richard whirled back from the rail. "No one——"

"I went down there *twice,*" she said; "the first time while you were in Pueblos. . . . You must forgive me, dear, but I had no choice. I knew that it was a battle to the death between our love and his power. I knew that there could be no compromise. If there was a Venzelos down there, then he must be destroyed. I went down with your revolver, prepared to destroy him."

"Judith!"

"I shall never tell you what I saw, but there was nothing *alive.* There were many—sacks, and a skeleton. Perhaps—I do not know—the skeleton was his. The skeleton was twisted beneath a hideous, worm-eaten sack. It was as though the sack had struck it and knocked it down for ever——"

"Judith! What are you trying to tell me?"

"A horror far beyond our greatest imaginings has happened to you, Richard. It was killing you surely, day by day. If this creature Venzelos ever really lived in the pit, he died there, too. He died years ago, and you have been tossing those things to emptiness.

"No, don't interrupt, dear. I thought I sensed the answer as I stood half-way down the stairs and saw the skeleton and the sacks. I was stunned and horrified—and then I realized about the mask.

"The mask was his medium of hypnotism. It was the mask that summoned you from your sleep and dragged you to this place. It was the mask that stared at you so hauntingly and awakened his commands within your brain. It was the mask that frightened you and dazed you, and brought you back time and time again to an endless bidding.

"How or why he did these things, we can never know; they are things we never want to know. It was a challenge to our love, Richard—but we have victored over it. The power of the mask, once in your mind, never left you. It was a malignant thing, lying dormant. Venzelos died before he could remove the hypnosis—the hypnosis remained, recurring more frequently as the months wore on. There might have been no end at all. . . .

"I tried to appeal to you when I learned that he was dead, but you could not hear me. I went into the room and barred the door. Only then did my screams really reach you.

"I was truly afraid, Richard. I was afraid that his power had dragged you down too deeply. He was dead, but he lived on in the evil of the mask. Someone had to break the mask—*you* had to break it, dear; for only then could you feel yourself its true master. But the very mask itself prevented you from doing so.

"It was a battle to the death between our love and a nameless thing. When you came flying through that door, and when I saw the maddened glint in your eyes and heard your curse, then I knew, Richard, that shattered or unshattered, dead or undead, the power of Venzelos and his mask was broken for ever!"

Fangs of Vengeance

By NATHAN HINDIN

An eery story of an animal-trainer in a circus—of nine ravening leopards and a weird black panther that chose its time for vengeance

CAPTAIN ZAROFF was not his real name. But then, of course, it did not happen at Stellar Brothers Circus, either. Both appellations are fictitious, though the facts—more the pity—are all too true. I know, for I was there to see the drama unfold; a drama of death and blood-stained vengeance, set against the glittering background of circus make-believe.

The affair occurred, fortunately, in winter quarters. That is the only reason it was fortunate enough to escape press notice. Despite its sensational aspects, I am very thankful that we were able to hush the whole thing up. It is not good for the common herd to know too much, and there are certain terrible questions in connection with it that are extremely difficult to answer. All that has ever leaked out is that Captain Zaroff met death in the big cage during a rehearsal of his act, and that his animals were shot in a vain effort to save him. Concerning the Ubangis, the press was informed that due to disagreements over salary, they severed their connection with the show.

There was something wrong from the very start that winter. We had had a bad season, and the old man decided that innovations were in order. Culper sent out an agent for the Ubangi troupe—six duck-billed and exceedingly ugly savages, only a year removed from their native jungles. But the old man didn't stop there, either. He decided to go back to wild animal acts—a policy we had discarded some eight years previous. He argued that the public wants excitement—the cracking of whips, the snarling of sullen cats, the roaring of restless lions.

Now for some unknown reason, the majority of the larger shows have abandoned the cat acts within the last ten years. The result is that good animal-trainers are mighty hard to find. Practically the only ones available are Europeans, and they're scarce enough. So the old man counted himself lucky when a German agency sent him Captain Zaroff.

He arrived early in January. I wasn't there at the time, but he was described as very distant, and very foreign. He had his own quarters, and special cages for the nine leopards in his troupe. He even insisted on keeping his personal assistant to clean the wagons and feed the animals. These affectations of exclusiveness, coupled with his extremely reserved manner, did not win him any friends. He, on his own part, seemed unmindful of the circus people; eating alone, sleeping in his own private wagon on the winter grounds, and devoting all his time and attention to his act.

There were many vague and conflicting rumors floating around concerning the man. For one thing, there were speculations as to his age and nationality. It was said that he was just back from Africa, and that he was breaking in these jungle leopards for the new act. Another version of the story represented him as being driven from the Continent in disgrace, following a scandal over a woman. By the time I returned to headquarters, the whole show was engaged in wild speculation. I disregarded it all.

Then I saw him work. It was the first time, and only the old man and I were present in the barn-like hippodrome which held the great steel cage. Zaroff had promised the old man something distinctively different. He got it.

PICTURE to yourself a vast wooden arena, with white, bare walls that reflect hideously all the glare of a hundred overhead lights. In the center, a steel cage. Two assistants stand beside it, tense and alert. Occasionally, they finger nervously with their guns—guns that are not loaded with blanks. The boss and I sat on chairs placed near the door, our eyes glued on the runway. The old man chewed viciously on the stub of his cigar. The atmosphere was charged with the static electricity of fearful expectation.

There are no bands playing in the winter quarters, no happy, cheering crowds. No clowns perform their antic drolleries to ease the tension with a laugh. Working with newly broken jungle beasts is by no means the same safe routine as a

"Zaroff, mumbling incoherently, told me of these things."

developed act. The real danger does not strike after the spectacular routine is perfected—it comes before, during the long, slow hours of winter training. It was with this thought in our minds that we waited in that silent, empty barn; waited, and worried.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a moan. From the wooden runway on the other side of the steel cage came the soft and purposeful padding of velvet feet—and the scrape of razored claws. Short, guttural coughs echoed in the air. At the same time our nostrils were filled with a warm, fetid odor of jungle musk—the wild-beast smell that makes the short hairs rise on the nape of one's neck. More coughs—amplified to a menacing roar in the vast silence of that looming atmosphere. They were coming!

Down the runway stalked a tawny shape—the spotted, sinister shape of a giant African leopard; graceful as a serpent and beautiful as death. Green eyes roved restlessly over the arena with an emerald glare. Yellow fangs parted, revealing a long, slavering tongue. The beast slunk stiff-legged around the arena, then turned to us with a roar. I suddenly realized that I was bathed in perspiration.

Another yellow body catapulted into the cage. Like a streak of amber lightning it leapt to the bars and clawed madly at the steel. Suddenly it subsided, and sank to the sawdust in a spasm of insanely hysterical laughter. A third spotted devil entered, suavely. Like an overgrown cat it purred, mincing its way as it made a circuit of the cage. Feline-like, it rolled over on its mottled back, exposing a sleek belly beneath which muscles played like bands of pliable steel. The other two animals growled deeper still. Then, like a golden avalanche, a horde of fanged furies raced down the runway—six snarling demons charged into the arena, and hell broke loose. In a moment the steel enclosure became a maelstrom of yellow shapes, tearing with frenzied talons at the iron barriers, and howling in fiendish chorus to the skies. There was death in their claws, hatred in their foam-flecked jowls, and blood-lust in their feral eyes. Beasts of the jungle, awaiting the coming of man.

They did not wait for long. Into the hippodrome stalked Captain Zaroff. A tall, thin, commanding figure of a man, his was the walk of a conqueror. Beneath his gorgeously-epauletted red coat I sensed the strength of supple sinews; the resiliency of his walk betrayed a perfection of muscular control. His face was immobile, but his eyes held a faint tinge of amusement. Slightly graying black hair worn in pompadour style, and a tiny waxed mustache—by these signs alone did he betray his foreign birth.

With a brief nod to the old man, he motioned the two assistants to unbar the cage. I gasped. For Zaroff had no chair! All he carried in his hand was a whip—to face nine ravening wild beasts, mad with animal excitement!

Clang. Steel grated on steel. The cage door was open. Quickly, Zaroff stepped inside—into that maelstrom of bared fangs, raking claws, and supple bodies crouched to kill. A roar of animal ferocity greeted his appearance. I gasped. Zaroff, weaponless in that vast cage with a jungle act! Every trainer carries both gun and chair during the breaking in of a new cat routine. With the points of the chair outthrust before him he can ward off the sudden charge of a nervous beast. The animal, confused by the underside of the chair presented before him, usually bruises his nose and paws on the four projecting legs. For many years this protection, slim as it is, has saved dozens of trainers' lives. But Zaroff had no chair. Nor was there a gun at his hip. Alone, he faced them—a

sneer on his face and a whip in his hand; man's eternal defiance of the brute.

For an instant he stood there just inside the cage, while ten feet away jungle eyes roved restlessly, jungle bodies flexed stealthily, jungle throats roared fearsomely. Suddenly, a leopard detached itself from the rest and began, ever so slowly, to edge its way forward on its belly. It was the big cat that had entered first. Zaroff watched it, his face flushed. To all intents and purposes the beast's body appeared relaxed, but it was slinking forward nevertheless, and its yellow tail lashed in fury.

WITHOUT warning, the leopard sprang. Into the air it soared, straight for Zaroff's shoulders; red maw glistening, ferocious claws outspread to rend, and tear, kill and destroy. Swift as the attack was, Zaroff had anticipated it. His hand shot out, loosing the thongs of the whip. The lash hissed like a serpent as it wriggled through the air. The heavy, weighted end curled smoothly around the spotted murderer, imprisoning the tawny neck and jerking the feline's body to the ground, where it lay choking and gasping for several moments. The other cats, meanwhile, had retreated to the other side of the cage. Zaroff, drenched and panting, turned his head to us—and smiled!

Then began the most amazing animal routine in circus history. While the old man and I trembled and the assistants gasped in awe, Zaroff, with only a whip in his hand, put those animals through paces so amazing that they pass the bounds of credibility. The beasts did everything but fly. Balancing, juggling, jumping, group-posing—everything in the regular wild-animal show repertoire was used and improved on. At the sound of Zaroff's whip every cat was in its place. Despite snarls, growls, and obvious attempts to buffet the trainer from their perches, the creatures obeyed him perfectly. It was a great act—and I sighed with relief when it was finished.

The old man waxed enthusiastic. Surely Captain Zaroff would make show history! How he ever got new cats intelligent enough to build a routine like that was a mystery. Zaroff should be more careful, though. It was a bad business, going into the cage with only a whip.

After we left the hippodrome I went over to the front office for a quiet smoke. Somehow I couldn't agree with the old man. The act was good, no doubt, but there were some queer things to be explained.

To begin with, I know enough about the big cage to realize that no trainer could do what Zaroff had done when his animals hated him. An act is built very slowly, one animal at a time; for the tamer must instill trust and respect into the minds of his performers. Learning the tricks is a task founded on affection for the teacher.

Yet the leopards hated Zaroff—hated and feared him!

Then, too—Zaroff knew that they were dangerous and unfriendly. Even a well-trained leopard is never *tame*, as a lion or a bear can be. And despite that knowledge, the captain was foolish enough not to use a chair.

Surely there was some mystery here. New African leopards, and a foreign trainer who dislikes strangers. Private cages for the beasts, and a special attendant. A wonderful act, beautifully performed by raw beasts who are openly antagonistic to their trainer.

I recalled some of the rumors floating around the lots concerning Zaroff and his cats. Something about queer adventures in Africa. Oh, well, it was all nonsense—the man was merely a skilful trainer. But even a skilful trainer cannot make

his animals work so *intelligently*. The whole thing was very strange. I decided to keep an eye on the man and wait for something to turn up. I didn't have to wait very long.

THREE days later the Ubangis arrived. They had been signed for the act in New York, and were shipped south under the personal supervision of Culper himself. To me they proved a woeful disappointment. Six small, timid-looking blacks; three male and three female —their only exotic feature was the widely publicized lip deformity that gave them mouths projecting almost a foot from their faces. Even this barbaric feature looked sadly incongruous, since all six wore American clothes. Imagine a Harlem flapper with lips a foot long and eight inches wide and you will get some picture of what I saw.

But the old man was pleased. The Ubangis must have special quarters. Was their interpreter here? He trusted that none of them had suffered overmuch on the journey. He hoped they would find the accommodations sufficiently comfortable. In the face of all this effusiveness, the blacks remained nervously silent. Without a word they suffered themselves to be led off to their sleeping-quarters.

During the next few days the Ubangis kept us busy. Not only did we have our hands full trying to explain their part in the performance through an interpreter, but we also had to contend with a really profound ignorance. They obviously knew the meaning of money—dollars meant francs, and francs meant luxury back on the Ivory Coast. That was why they had signed up. But as to the meaning of their duties, they were completely in the dark. Personally, I was not able to work up any enthusiasm over the whole venture. The poor savages were unhappy, the old man was unhappy, and the prospects of box-office draw were uncertain. But the old man had to touch off the fireworks.

He decided to stage one of the preliminary rehearsals, and arrange for the Ubangis to attend. There they could actually see a circus, and perhaps their part would be easier to understand thereafter. I was not pleased with the idea, but it was carried out. The six blacks occupied one of the observation booths, and the show went on.

At first everything went smoothly enough. Even the savage can appreciate the instinctive appeal of clown humor, and realize the agility of the aerial performers. They beamed like carefree children and jabbered constantly among themselves.

I was waiting for Zaroff. I knew that for the past few days he had been rehearsing at great length, and was eager to observe the changes or improvements in his act. The rest of the show waited, too. They had never seen him work, and the rumors had only whetted their curiosity.

The act went on. For fifteen minutes all eyes were glued on that steel cage. Zaroff outdid himself that day. His whip for ever cracking, he put the carnivores through their paces in a way to keep everyone's attention riveted to the arena.

At last, when the coughing, snarling leopards had bounded back down the runway into their cages, the boss and I turned to the Ubangis to get their reaction.

It was not slow in coming. The entire troupe were excitedly haranguing one another in their box. At length they approached us, headed by their interpreter.

Hesitatingly, he announced that the troupe would not play in the show; that it resigned. Nor would he give any further explanation, save that the Ubangis

did not care for Captain Zaroff and his act.

The boss fumed, swore, threatened, entreated, and pleaded. It did not avail. The savages left the following day.

But before they departed I went around and had a talk with their interpreter myself. Somehow I sensed a mystery behind their reasons for departure, and I questioned the man very closely. At last he abandoned his reserve and told me the details as he had overheard them.

Briefly, the Ubangis did not like Zaroff's act, but their aversion did not have a natural cause. They were going because they thought Zaroff himself was a witch-doctor; because they had heard him *talk to his animals.*

Naturally I was inclined to scoff at this statement. But then I began to remember certain details. Zaroff lived alone, took care of his animals alone. He had his own cages, his own assistant keeper. He avoided company, and spent most of his time with the beasts. It was quite possible that he did talk to his leopards.

But when I told the interpreter, he laughed. The Ubangis knew of such men, and feared them. Zaroff was a wizard, for they could see that he talked to the animals and they answered him! They had seen Zaroff growl in the cage as if he himself were a beast, and they saw the leopards answer his commands. The man was an evil shaman.

That was the substance of the Ubangis' complaint, as I got it from the interpreter. I left him a puzzled man. There was something hidden away in my brain that was beginning to bother me as it tried to edge into consciousness. Something about leopards.

THE next day brought a train of events which further puzzled me.

I was walking through the menagerie quarters when the affair began. It was midafternoon, and the place was deserted, for the entire troupe was over in the arena for regular rehearsals. I rounded the horseshoe bend where the regular cages stood, and passed by the partitioned section. Here Zaroff's leopards were quartered. Behind the canvas which screened the cages from the rest I caught a glimpse of booted feet. That would be Zaroff himself, feeding the beasts. Low moans and bestial laughter drifted over the canvas walls.

Then all at once I heard a sudden roar, louder than the rest, and a terrible clang of bars. Zaroff's voice rose in an angry curse, and it was answered by a terrible growl. Suddenly a streak of spotted lightning leapt through the side of the canvas, which shredded before saber claws. One of the leopards had escaped.

It landed on its feet and stood crouching there not a dozen feet before me; a great, tawny monster with flaming fury in its evil eyes. Slaver dripped from its wrinkled, furry snout as it glared at me with unmistakable menace. Its back stiffened, and I broke out into a cold sweat as the fanged horror edged toward me, tensing to spring. Quivering with fright I watched it, unable to move, or even breathe. Its feline gaze held me hypnotically rigid; for I knew that I was staring at the face of Death. The leopard gathered itself for a leap.

Crack! The sound of Zaroff's whip broke the tension. The tall figure stepped into view from behind the canvas, blazing fury in his face. At the sound of his master's approach the sullen carnivore turned. With a snarl it gazed up into the captain's face, but its body was still crouched and ready to hurtle in attack.

Then I heard with my own ears that which my mind told me could never be. I heard Zaroff talk to his leopard!

Low barks and growls issued from his throat. The voice of a beast came from

human lips. And the leopard answered! Cringing, it fawningly approached its trainer, growling in return. And its growls and cries held a note that was dreadfully, unmistakably *human!*

It was hideous to hear a beast murmuring like a man and a man roaring like a beast. I trembled afresh as Zaroff, with cries of animal rage, brought his whip down over the leopard's shoulders; brought it down with full force again and again until the poor creature's dappled hide was streaked with crimson stains. And all the while it kept whining, purring, pleading in monstrously human tones, while Zaroff screamed like a great cat.

With never a look or word for me, he drove the leopard to its quarters. From behind the canvas I heard the bars grate into their place once more, and then Zaroff reappeared.

This time he was not alone. There was a woman with him—a beautiful woman.

She was tall and slim, like a Grecian Diana, with a body of ivory and hair like ebony. Jade-green eyes dominated her aquiline face, contrasted oddly with her vivid red-lipped mouth and tiny white teeth. She wore a regal velvet dress which stood out incongruously amidst the sawdust atmosphere surrounding her.

I prided myself on knowing the entire personnel of our show, but I had never seen the woman before.

Zaroff, after apologizing to me for the disturbance, introduced her as his wife, Camille. The woman bowed graciously, but remained silent, eyeing her husband with restrained anger. I was speechless.

I had never known that Zaroff was married. I was just beginning to realize that there were a lot of things about him that I didn't know; a lot of things requiring considerable explanation. The scene I had just witnessed, for example. He was explaining about that now.

With elaborate ostentation he again apologized for the accident. The beast had escaped as he was feeding it. He was very sorry, and he would see that it did not occur again. He would be extremely pleased if I would refrain from reporting the affair to the management; it would unnecessarily upset people, he explained.

Here the woman broke in.

"He's lying, *M'sieu*. It will happen again, I know. You must report it; it happened in Europe, and a little boy was killed. He did nothing to prevent it, *M'sieu*, even when it began to—feed. You must make him stop beating them—it frightens me. Please, tell them and make them stop him. Please!"

Zaroff's countenance, as he listened to this recital, turned red with rage. He raised his whip—the long, cruel whip, still red from the lashing of the leopard—and brought it down on the woman's back with full force. She screamed, once. Then he seized her, and without a backward glance, bore her behind the canvas.

I stood stunned at the rapidity of events, then stumbled off to my own quarters. I wanted to be alone and think.

Zaroff—a foreigner whom nobody knew; a man who beat his leopards and his wife. Zaroff—the most brilliant trainer I had ever seen; hated and feared by his animals, yet obeyed. Zaroff—the man who talked to his cats like a beast, while they answered with the cries of men; Zaroff, whom the Ubangi savages denounced as a witch-doctor and wizard. Who was this man? What was he? Why was he so furtive and unfriendly? What was he doing to his wife that made her hate and fear him as much as the leopards did?

Before the show opened that year I must find out. And Camille Zaroff, I

decided, was the woman who could and would tell me.

SHOW business occupied my time heavily for the next few days, but the mystery of Zaroff still occupied my thoughts. Somehow, I was beginning to hate the man. I disliked his cruel, unsmiling features, his reticent, almost disdainful manner, and his pompous, arrogant walk. I did not care for the way he treated his feline charges, and I did not wonder that his wife was afraid.

His wife—there was another angle. When I saw her she had been afraid, but I could see that she wanted to speak. Perhaps that was why Zaroff had kept her away from the rest of the show-people. Maybe she was his prisoner, because of what she knew. He had beaten her with the whip. . . .

He beat her often. Several nights later, as I went through the menagerie quarters on my way to the main office, I saw a light behind the canvas partition where Zaroff's tent stood. I am not by nature or inclination an eavesdropper, but no one could ignore the shouts that came from the other side. The voices were audible throughout the deserted menagerie, and I recognized the guttural tones of Zaroff blending with the thrilling, husky speech of his wife, Camille.

"I will tell them all," she was saying. "I can't stand it any longer, do you hear? Knowing what I know, and seeing what I see. Unless you stop this dreadful business, I will tell them all."

A cynical laugh, almost gloating in its sardonic cadence. That would be Zaroff.

"Oh, no you won't, my dear. I have been gentle with you in the past—too gentle. But if you persist in making these—ah—demonstrations, I can take harsher measures."

"I'm not afraid of you any more. Tomorrow I shall go to him who is the head of this show and tell him the truth. You will no longer keep me caged up here like one of your beasts."

Again that mocking cackle of laughter from the man.

"So—I shall no longer cage you as I do my beasts, eh? We shall see. You know about my leopards, and what happened on the Guinea Coast, eh? Well—how would you like it if I were to——"

The voice trailed off here into a loathsome whisper, then culminated again in peal after peal of demoniacal mirth.

"No!" the woman screamed. "You dare not do that. I will go now—do you hear me?—now! I'll tell them all! Oh!"

There was a low moan, and then the hateful sound of a striking whip. Again and again I heard the hiss of a lash.

Clenching my hands in a frenzy of fury, I bit my lips to keep from crying aloud and rushing into that tent. I wanted to tear the whip from that unnatural monster and flog him. Red anger surged and poured into my brain, but something held me back.

There was more to this than a domestic quarrel. That woman, with her half-heard hints of secret things, was being mistreated for a purpose. It would do no good to accost Zaroff himself for an explanation and it would be worse than useless to precipitate a scene before the entire company. No, diplomacy urged me to wait. Tomorrow I would seek an opportunity to speak to Camille Zaroff alone. She would gladly talk then. Perhaps things could be straightened out.

Meanwhile, the show went into its final rehearsal in two days, and Zaroff was a good animal-trainer. I decided to bide my time, and left the tent. But that night I dreamed of a man, a leopard, and a whip. And the dream was far from pleasant. . . .

The next day brought with it an entirely unexpected surprize. At nine

o'clock a man walked into my office and casually took a seat. Looking up, I gazed into the impassive face of Captain Zaroff.

I was astonished. The man had never come to me before; he habitually kept away from the rest of the company. Concealing both my surprize and distaste, I asked him his business.

"I am bringing in a new animal for my act," he said, calmly.

For a moment I was too startled to speak. The final dress rehearsal only two days away, and he was going to work a new cat! It was unheard of. I told him so. Besides, what did he need a new leopard for?

"Do not worry," he assured. "It is already broken in; I—I had it shipped here this morning. And it is not a leopard—it is a black panther."

A black panther! That *was* a novelty. A trifle mollified, I told him that he would have to take the matter up with the boss.

"I will rehearse tomorrow afternoon," he agreed, suavely. "Would you care to come over and look at the animal?"

TOGETHER we walked across the lot and entered the menagerie. There were ten cages behind the canvas partition now. In nine were the leopards; the other held the new beast. We approached the bars.

There is nothing more beautiful than a black panther. Sleek, sinuous grace is personified in its ebony body, and aristocratic poise blazes forth from its jade eyes. Its nervous pace is regal; it is a picture of dignified beauty even when enraged. Consequently I expected much of Zaroff's acquisition. But I was to be disappointed.

The animal crouched behind the bars, its body limply lolling on the floor of the cage. Its exquisite black coat was disheveled, and on its back I detected the marks of the whip. Had Zaroff already begun his usual practises? The animal's eyes were lusterless; they gazed on me with a sort of dazed, numb expression in their depths. It whined, piteously, and once again I was shocked at the almost human tones in the throat of a jungle beast. When Zaroff approached closer, the panther cringed, and crawled away from the bars.

"Is it sick?" I inquired.

Zaroff smiled. "No, my friend. Perhaps the journey has tired it—the change, shall we say? It will be all right."

The great black cat whined dolefully. It kept staring at me with those amber eyes—staring and staring, as if it were humanly aware of my presence. With a slight shudder, I turned away. In order to make conversation, I casually asked after the health of Zaroff's wife.

A queer look came into the man's face.

"She—she has gone away," he said. But his stolid features were averted. "She has been nervous and ill of late, so I thought it would be best if she went for a rest instead of going out with the show. We had an argument last night, and she took the train this morning."

The man is lying. Accuse him.

The words ate their way into my brain.

He may have beaten her to death.

But such thoughts were mad. My eyes searched wildly for something on which to rest; something to divert my thoughts. I looked at the leopard cages. The cats were all curled up somnolently near the bars, as if they had just eaten. As if they were sated with food, rather.

Maybe he fed her to the leopards.

Was I really going insane?

She was going to tell a secret. I heard him threaten her with something, and he spoke of leopards before she screamed.

Why not? No one would ever know.

My mind rocked with chaotic confu-

sion. The woman was gone; as we passed the living-quarters I saw that the tent was empty and I knew he never allowed her to wander free. What had become of her?

Zaroff watched me with an enigmatic smile. Did he suspect?

"I will see you at rehearsal tomorrow," he said. "Good day."

I stumbled out into the menagerie. As I passed the last cage the panther raised its head and moaned.

I OFTEN wonder how I got through the rest of that day. The morbid suspicions that preyed on my mind had come to a harrowing climax. I kept thinking of Zaroff, and the queer rumors I had heard about the man. His leopards were queer, his act was queer, his whole history was shrouded in a cloak of nebulous dread. His wife knew, and she had disappeared. I must find out the truth.

But perhaps I was wrong. Imagination, once unleashed, can distort facts immeasurably. Possibly his wife had left. True, he had beaten her, but they do such things on the Continent. The leopards were queerly trained, but Zaroff was an eccentric man. Was I unduly suspicious?

These two conflicting trains of thought ran riot through my brain. The afternoon was a dream. I performed my routine functions automatically, but I could not forget. I neglected to inform the boss that Captain Zaroff had a new black panther, and I said nothing about the rehearsal on the following day.

That night was the beginning of the end.

What impelled me I cannot say, but I felt that I must learn the truth. So at midnight I rose from my restless cot and staggered off to Zaroff's quarters. The lot was black and deserted, save for the looming shadows that lurked and capered in the corners beneath a leering yellow moon.

There was a light in Zaroff's tent when I entered. How I meant to excuse myself or what I intended to say I did not know. But Zaroff took the situation into his own hands.

He was quite drunk. There was a bottle on the table before him, and another on the floor. He sat there sprawled back so that he resembled a seated corpse in the dim light, and his face was equally pale. He had discarded his uniform, but the ever-present whip still rested on the ground beside him.

"Sit down, my friend," he mumbled. His foreign accent became more noticeable under the influence of liquor.

I seated myself beside him and haltingly began to talk. But his libations had made him loquacious, and he interrupted.

I cannot say to this day what got him started, or whether he was too drunk to understand, but he told me plenty.

Somehow he launched out on the story of his career during the war. He had, it seems, been an officer in the "Belgische Congo." Later, he had become an animal trader in Senegal, and served as guide to several expeditions on the Sierra Leone coast.

I let him ramble, occasionally prompting him to refill his glass. Sooner or later, I believed, something would slip out. It did.

As the shadows about us deepened, his voice became lower and more confidential. He was speaking of the blacks now —the furtive, sinister blacks of Sierra Leone, who practised voodoo and obeah rites in the hidden swamps. He told me of the witch-doctors who invoked the Crocodile God to the beat of jungle drums; spoke of the snake-gods of secret, inner Africa. And he whispered of the Leopard-men.

I had heard of them before—the human leopards of Sierra Leone, whose cult was dedicated to the beasts of the forest. They were said to be vampires, possessing the power of anthropomorphism; that is, they could, by means of secret spells, become leopards themselves. This they were reputed to do, at certain times. As leopards they lay in wait for their enemies and destroyed them, or else invoked their rites to transform their foes into animals. I had read newspaper stories about the British police and their futile efforts to stamp out the dreaded clan.

Zaroff, mumbling incoherently, told me of these things again; spoke of how he himself had been initiated into the Leopard Cult one night beneath the waning autumn moon that gloats over Africa when the devil drums boom in nighted swamps. He told me of the spells he had learned from the shriveled arch-priests, and of the powers he could invoke by chants and rituals.

"Remember the legend of Circe?" he whispered, and his eyes were alight with unnatural flame. "Man into beast. Man into beast."

Abruptly he recovered himself once more, and changed the subject. By now he was so drunk that his voice slurred unintelligibly as he droned on. All I could catch were occasional phrases, but that was enough.

"I decided to show the fools a real act . . . knew the proper spells . . . rest was easy . . . nobody suspected. . . . Came to Europe with me. . . . Wish to God I'd never met and married that slut . . . spying on me at night . . . found out . . . spoiled the act . . . that damned child. . . . They wanted blood . . . scandal. . . . Looked all right here, but those Ubangis knew . . . her stubbornness . . . had to do it . . . was the only way. . . ."

As his voice droned on, his body slid flaccidly to the floor. I left, but I had not found the satisfaction I sought. Instead, my heart was filled with a greater and more hideous unease.

The man's drunken tales had disturbed me. Of course all that rot about Leopard-men was childish, but still I felt afraid. There were those who believed it, and some of his furtive hints had smacked of the truth. Funny, what liquor will do to a man. But I could not dismiss the incident so easily. There was a strange and terrible mystery here.

As I stalked off to my quarters I saw the blazing eyes of the black panther staring silently at me in the darkness. A crazy thought assailed me—perhaps it knew the truth! With a shaky smile I turned away.

Of course I should have reported all this to the boss. A drunken trainer who abuses his animals is never to be tolerated in a show. But something held me back. I would at least wait until the final rehearsal the following afternoon. Zaroff would work the new panther then, and there would be a showdown.

There was a showdown, but not the kind I expected.

I can see it now, in my mind's eye—that bare arena, with the great steel cage in the center. The boss and I were sitting in the box, just as we had sat that first day. The clown number had just ended, and now four men took their places about the grim, barred barrier.

Zaroff swaggered into view. Despite his debauchery of the previous evening he was as cool and erect as ever. As he entered the little green-grilled door, his hand clenched tightly about the butt of his whip.

The runway into the arena jerked into place between the bars. The wooden gates opened.

Claws and fangs clicking, growls and coughs rumbling, tongues lolling and

tails lashing, the leopards entered. Tawny bodies and green eyes, red throats and white teeth.

Nine leopards, and then—the panther.

The leopards had raced in, roaring their defiance. The panther sidled down the runway with stealthy tread. It uttered no sound, but entered the arena like a silent black shadow.

Zaroff cracked his whip. But today the leopards did not move. Instead, they held their places, a note of menace rumbling low in their great throats. They gave the curious impression that they were waiting for something. Zaroff cracked his whip again, impatiently.

The black panther padded over to the group of giant cats, then turned and stared at Zaroff.

Captain Zaroff stared back. There was a strange look on his face; he actually appeared to be nervous. He cracked his whip again, and swore. The growling in the leopards' throats rose in a thundering crescendo, but they did not move. The panther lashed its tail and continued to stare hypnotically at the tamer with evil, lambent eyes.

Sweat broke out on Zaroff's brow. I could have sworn that I saw a look of positive hate on that black beast's face as it gazed at the man. The trainers, guns ready, moved closer to the bars outside. They sensed something. Why didn't the man do something?

The leopards roared louder. They were grouped behind the panther now, and the panther, step by step, was slowly inching forward. Its tail shot erect, but it never took its eyes from Zaroff's tormented white face.

Suddenly, with a shriek of almost human fury, the black body of the beast rose in the air and sprang for Zaroff's neck. The leopards closed in, and the man went down beneath the fangs of ten jungle cats. There were shrieks from crimson-dabbled lips, then all sound was blotted out, as the four trainers shot blindly, pumping lead into that knot of blazing yellow bodies, shooting and shooting and shooting. . . .

The end came quickly, and only dead bodies remained about the mangled ruins of the thing that had once been Captain Zaroff.

Nobody ever speaks of that scene any more, but the tragedy itself was not the greatest horror. For I found the truth in Zaroff's private papers, and learned those things that had been hidden.

Now I know why Zaroff left Africa, and what he had really learned about the Cult of the Leopard-men. I know now why he boasted that he was going to have the greatest animal act in the world, and why he took such unusual precautions to guard and care for the beasts himself. I know how he was able to train them so well, and why the Ubangis thought he was talking to the creatures.

And I know just how his wife went away, too, and what she would have tried to tell the boss. It's not pleasant knowledge—those things in the papers and diaries of the dead trainer.

But it is infinitely more endurable than the memory of that last terrible sight—that dreadful glimpse of what lay in the arena when Zaroff, the leopards and the panther died. I can never forget that, because it is the final proof of all I dreaded to believe.

Captain Zaroff's chewed and lacerated form lay in a great pool of blood. Around him were the bodies of what the men with the guns had slain—nine bodies, not of leopards, but of negro men. Negro Leopard-men, from Africa.

And the tenth—the dreadful thing that was tearing at Zaroff's throat; the new black panther with the human eyes —*was his wife, Camille!*

So Very Strange!

By ARTHUR WILLIAM BERNAL

An odd little story—What happened on that slippery city street?

AT FIRST there was only confusion. Not light or lack of light, not sound or lack of sound—simply a dull confusion. Confusion in the abstract, one might say, without shape or tone or form.

Netter was aroused from this state of vague bewilderment to an awareness of the things about him by the shrill scream of a horrified woman. The vacuous blur gave birth to a scream of horror, and Netter, as though someone had snapped open invisible shutters within him, opened his eyes, his ears—opened all his senses to the present.

Aroused now, the first thing he did was to stop his legs. They had been mechanically plodding off to somewhere and now he made them stop. Then Netter raised his eyes from his feet (his habitual posture), and drew himself erect. He was the least bit surprized that he did not feel the little twinge of pain which usually crept into his shoulders at such an effort. For the first time in months the sensation of standing up straight filled Netter with its subtle pleasure. He smiled, and with the smile there came a soft glow to ease his veins with its congenial warmth.

Netter felt very happy, comfortable. A moment before he had been worrying over something—over . . . well, something that he had now quite forgotten. Whatever it was, he had probably exaggerated its importance. The point was, that up to a second ago he had been absorbed in gloomy thought, blind to the world about him. And now, suddenly, he was strangely standing to his full height, looking at the world around him, and being highly pleased at what he saw.

Never had Netter's eyes been so sharp, never so sensitive to form and beauty in trivial things. And this, even though his spectacles were somehow missing from his nose! What had formerly been a drab, sodden street crossing, sloppy and dismal during the few minutes' interval between two ugly winter showers, was now a satisfying, refreshing picture. The January sun, pale but pleasant, was a disk of dainty orange overhead, its delicately warming rays casting rain-soaked rooftops into sharp relief. All the compact houses on that street smelt fresh and clean after their day's washing in the rain.

The broad black street beneath him glistened also, with the clear sheen of a sugar glaze. Car tracks, crisp, silver things that raced like straight eels down the asphalt away from him, were like a symbolic decoration to a still-life sort of painting—symbolism representing the iron miracles of busy mankind.

But life was not lacking from this picture, and Netter, filling his nostrils again with crisp, dust-free air, sharp and stimulating as the smell of pine needles in a wooded country, turned his attention to the people who were ebbing past him. And here was the flaw in the picture. The people—two or three men and women and half a dozen young students like himself—were all coming toward him from the same direction; and thus Netter was enabled to get a clear view of each one's face. Without exception, the

pale features that swam toward him were drawn, worried, fretful. Not one was smiling, though several, after snatching hasty glowering glances at the soft gray heavens, were frowning with irritation. Netter felt a large, placid drop kiss his forehead and knew it was going to rain once more. Disconsolate, anxious, the people all hurried to Netter, ignored him, passed him by where he stood on the car tracks. He wanted to stretch out a hand, to stay one of the peevish group, find out what was behind this universal discontent. In keeping with his intention, Netter drew a hand from his overcoat pocket and reached out. Suddenly he stopped short.

Heretofore, while he had been standing where he was in the middle of the street, his ears, hypersensitively attuned to sounds, had caught and appreciated several very distinct and equally charming sounds. As a background to them all, there had come to him with a surprizing clarity the steady musical *drip-drip-drip* of rain drops, trickling leisurely from awnings and house corners onto the wet pavement. Then, too, he had made out the soft *churr* of conversing birds, issuing from the telegraph pole across the way. There was the lulling *pad-pad* of leather on rainy cement, also, which told him of human feet shuffling by; not to forget the singing of rubber tires that followed an automobile's passing along the glassy street.

All other noises, if there were any, must have merged into a single monotone of muted sound which purled dimly through the rest of the natural symphony. Now, though, as Netter was about to detain a student who was scurrying toward the intersection, there came a new sound—a shrill note, that in being thus repeated, seemed to be a preordained signal which was to signify both the opening and the closing of Netter's pleasant little nature-concert of the past few seconds.

The sound was the scream of a horrified woman. . . .

NETTER faced himself about to see what had occasioned the outcry, and even as he did so there somehow blossomed inside his mind the peculiar realization that a second scream—an echo of the former one—had followed almost instantly upon the first, separated only by a breath. Netter's rapturous enjoyment of sight and sound, then, had taken place in the merest flash of time—had not lasted many minutes, but actually less than two seconds!

But now Netter was faced about, and new wonders met his gaze. He found himself in the midst of a small crowd of shifting heads and backs, the owners of which were all straining to catch a glimpse of something that lay huddled on the wet street. A chorus of anxious whispers muddled about him as Netter raised himself on tiptoe, the better to see. A vast bewilderment—the confusing familiarity of dreamed things—was suddenly exerting its influence upon him.

All at once a pale-faced woman thrust herself violently from the center of the throng. As she shoved past him, gasping for air, Netter was momentarily allowed a clear view of that at which the crowd was staring.

He saw first the giant wheels of a heavy truck. They were red-splashed as well as muddied from contact with the street. Netter's eyes then swept downward to the huddle beneath the grim tires, and his vision blurred with the shock of sudden recognition. The weaving heads blocked his view once more for a few seconds; then again he found himself staring down at the thin, crushed body of a poor student which lay in front of the impassive monster of rubber and

steel. The dead youth lay face upward, tawny hair wisping over pallid features, broken spectacles askew across the still, bloodless lips. It was evident from a single glance at that pale, calm face that the boy had died instantly, without even realizing that he had been struck down. The placid, gray eyes of the dead one, staring so earnestly into his own, vanished again behind a bobbing derby as a newcomer shouldered by the dazed Netter.

Slowly, Netter turned and left the crowd. He stood for a few seconds alone, in the center of the damp street, taking deep breaths of the cold, invigorating air to steady himself. He was trembling from head to foot. That familiar white, pinched face gazing so calmly up at him. . . .

Abruptly, Netter shrugged and straightened up. He was no longer trembling, though his mind still tumbled with oddly mixed emotions. Obeying an inward urge, Netter set out down the street, away from the accident. A voice within his brain was gently telling him it was time to depart.

But as he strolled off, Netter caught a half-whispered sentence which came floating from the scene behind him—just one sentence from a familiar throat, and Netter knew he must quicken his gait.

"Poor Netter!" the dimly wafted voice murmured. "Poor Netter! . . . dead."

Black Gold

By THORP McCLUSKY

An atrocity committed on a slave-ship comes to shocking discovery to wreak revenge on one of the captain's descendants

HENRY CABOT WADE stood in the small main cabin of the schooner *Marianne,* his patrician forefinger pointing out a small black cross that enigmatically marked the faded chart beneath his hands. Henry Cabot Wade's thin shoulders were stooped, for the cabin, although comfortably appointed, was low-ceiled. The last of the Wades was not as rich as his forefathers had been; as the family fortunes had shrunk so had their sailing craft.

"I think that this is the spot, Captain Manly." Wade's voice was thin, New Englandish, like the bite of frosty air.

Jeremiah Manly nodded. He spoke in a slow, twangy drawl.

"Yes. These are without doubt the two islands indicated on the chart. The strait between is the proper width, and our soundings indicate six fathoms of water."

Wade smiled bleakly.

"I suppose it is too late to begin the search today."

"Yes. The sunlight is fading. We'll remain at this anchorage for the night, and begin work around ten in the morning."

Wade's precise smile broadened.

"That glass-bottomed boat should get results in quick time. This isn't a wide channel." For a moment he squinted at the chart. "I wonder what we'll find?

Black gold! What a secretive way for my revered ancestor to put it down on paper! Ten tons of black gold! And he hid this chart away in the bottom of his personal chest, so carefully. What *is* black gold?"

Both men stared down at the chart.

It *was* enigmatic — that black cross marked at the mouth of a narrow strait that ran between two small islands. But more enigmatic than the aged chart was the incoherent message written in irregular, angular letters across its face:

> Here lie, six fathoms down, ten tons of black gold. And I know now that for this crime I am accursed. May God have mercy on my soul!

Captain Manly cleared his throat in embarrassment.

"You know how your ancestor Ebenezer Wade got his wealth, I assume?"

The owner's lips curled in a thin smile.

"Oh, yes, Captain," he assented, not at all apologetically. "He ran slaves. He bought them on the west coast of Africa and sold them in Savannah and New Orleans. There was money in it. We Wades, until the stock market up and busted us, always made money. Buying furs from the Indians, running loan banks, plunging in stocks—we were always exploiters, we Wades. Don't worry, Captain Manly; I know the bourgeois opinion of our family. But, as man to man it's the only way to get along."

Captain Manly did not lift his eyes from the chart.

"Perhaps," he said then, dryly. "A great many people seem to agree with you. But all this is beside the point. Mr. Wade, did you ever hear the old story that your great-grandfather dumped a shipload of niggers overboard—one time a curious frigate chased him? That he never went to sea afterward?"

Wade laughed sardonically.

"No Wade would have been that soft."

Captain Manly stroked his grizzled chin. He kept his eyes focused on the chart as he replied:

"This is a narrow, shallow channel, Mr. Wade. A light vessel, if chased, would very likely put in here, where a square-rigged frigate might be expected to have trouble, especially with a quartering wind. It would give a man time to unload his cargo. Nigger smell isn't real evidence, Mr. Wade."

For an instant the small cabin was still. Then Wade smiled, a trifle thinly.

"You're trying to tell me that one of my ancestors was fool enough to draw a chart showing where he'd dumped overboard a shipload of niggers?" he snapped. "You don't know the Wades."

Captain Manly's eyes lifted to the owner's finely chiseled face.

"No person can say with certainty what another human being might do," he said quietly.

Wade laughed harshly.

"We Wades *aren't* human beings—or so a great many people have said. I'll go on deck now and join Evelyn."

Slowly, as the owner stooped through the companionway, Captain Manly rolled up the chart.

2

"THANK Heaven, Aunt Leona's gone to bed at last."

Evelyn Phelps' clear, faintly metallic voice tinkled the words. With an appreciative laugh her fiancé hunched his deck chair closer to her own and slipped his wiry right arm possessively about her shoulders. Behind their backs the foremast, a naked black finger, reared up toward the stars. The tropic breeze, balmy from the near-by Gulf Stream, fragrant with the scent of near-by land, whispered in their faces; the islands to port and starboard were low-lying, palm-fringed masses edged with gleaming white. The

moon climbing over the bowsprit was bigger than an orange.

Henry Cabot Wade chuckled.

"A chaperone can be a nuisance on a night like this."

The girl sighed. "Isn't it lovely? Boston seems so far away—and money so unimportant."

For an instant, while the thought of their desiccated family fortunes swept between them, they were silent. No one knew better than they that if this search for black gold proved a failure she must marry someone else.

Restlessly, Henry Cabot Wade stirred.

"We'll get it up," he promised her, the words hard, "if we have to search every inch of this damned channel. We've brought the best diver money could buy, dynamite enough to blow up a city——"

She turned toward him and kissed his cheek, the fringe of his eyelashes, his thin, cruel lips. She admired his profile, sensitive, aquiline, somehow like that of a great predatory bird. . . .

They made love, while the moon crept from above the bowsprit to the foremast. . . .

Suddenly he stiffened, sat erect.

"Look there," he said sharply, pointing forward. Then he shook his head bewilderedly. "It's gone. Did you see it?"

She was touching her disheveled hair into place.

"See what?" she asked, her voice sleepy and warm. "I didn't see anything."

Puzzledly he muttered, "I thought I saw a—a head appear momentarily above the rail, and then vanish. It was just a—sort of dark blob. Optical illusion, I guess." He shrugged, took her, unresisting, in his arms. For long minutes they loved.

Then, abruptly, he loosed her, turned his head to peer forward. He had heard, distinctly, a soft, naked shuffling behind him!

And in that instant a strangled, high-pitched scream burst from his lips, and he was stumbling, scrambling to his feet, his face ashen, his mouth and eyes hideous with terror.

"Run, Evelyn, run!" He was flailing out with his fists in the moonlight, flailing out into—emptiness!

Swiftly she rose, took one step toward him. But he motioned her back. "Run! run! Get Captain Manly—I'll hold them off as long as I can!"

She found her voice, then. "Henry Cabot Wade," she said sharply, "have you gone suddenly crazy? Or is this your idea of humor?"

He did not seem to hear. And suddenly her flesh crawled.

His right fist, lashing out frenziedly, had jolted to an abrupt stop, as though it had struck something she could not see. And slowly, step by step, he was backing, backing toward the rail.

She could see his face now, half turned toward her. And she could see that this was no play-acting, that whatever was happening was, to him at least, horribly real. And still his fists lashed out, until suddenly his left arm lashed out no more, but remained close to his side, tugging, struggling weirdly, as though pinioned to his body by invisible hands.

And through his screams came nightmarish words:

"Run, Evelyn, run! For God's sake, get help! They're swarming over the rail; they're too many for me. Big black niggers, in rusty chains—ahh!"

The words ended in a bubbling moan. His right hand clawed frantically at his throat.

Like a puppet dangling at the end of invisible strings, he rose up and over the rail, *backward*, and vanished from sight. There was a hollow splash. . . .

Evelyn heard her own voice, babbling incoherently. Intermittent, chill waves of

terror swept over her, waves of terror and of horror. For she knew that no man could have leaped like that—over the rail. And the deck was moon-bathed, serene in its utter desertedness. . . .

5

CAPTAIN JEREMIAH MANLY stood at the *Marianne's* rail, ear-phones clamped to his head, looking down into the gray, gently heaving channel. His face, in the early dawn, was pale, and there was an odd quaver in his voice as he talked, in low tones, with the diver thirty feet below.

Except for the rhythmic soughing of the pump and the murmur of his own words there was no sound on the *Marianne's* deck. Evelyn Phelps was below, asleep; her aunt had given her morphine. The three members of the crew who were on deck did not speak.

The diver's mechanical speech came through the ear-phones.

"All right. Haul away. Then bring me up. I'm gettin' the jitters."

Half a minute later Henry Cabot Wade's body, the end of a half-inch rope knotted beneath the armpits, came over the rail. The sailors put the dripping corpse down gingerly on the deck and covered it with a tarpaulin.

The diver came up next, bulbous and cumbersome in his heavy suit and helmet. While the sailors stripped him of his helmet Captain Manly took the ear-phones from his own head and put them down with a sigh of relief. The soughing of the pump had ceased.

The diver climbed out of his suit, left it lying in a dripping heap on the deck. He looked at Captain Manly, and Captain Manly saw that the pupils of his eyes were enormous. Suddenly he began to tremble. He was afraid, now that he was safe on deck.

When he spoke, his voice was a croak.

"They were down there, dozens of them—skeletons picked clean by barracuda and shark—all linked together by one endless chain with half a ton of ballast on the end."

Captain Manly's lips moved. But no distinguishable words came forth. The diver sat down weakly beside the pump. He did not look toward the tarpaulin-shrouded form.

"Wade was tangled up in them—there were twenty or more of them piled *on top of him!* They broke all apart when I touched them.

"And one of them, right on the bottom of the pile, had him by the throat. I had to pick the fingerbones out of his neck. And the strangler wore this—this thing."

He extended a peculiar-looking ornament toward Captain Manly. Both men stared silently at the object.

It was a necklace of enormous *teeth,* curiously carved, and bound together by a thin golden wire.

Captain Manly cleared his throat. His mouth felt oddly dry.

"God!" he said, then, slowly. "He must've been a witch-doctor, a *shaman.* I've read about such things in the National Geographic Magazine. He must've put a curse on the Wades."

We Are the Dead

By HENRY KUTTNER

A poignant, brief tale of a weird experience in Arlington Cemetery

SENATOR KENNICOTT was grateful for the cool night wind on his flushed face. He wished Hobson, walking slowly at his side, would stop his interminable argument about the bill. The man's high-pitched, rather unpleasant voice seemed out of place, incongruous in the peaceful hush of Arlington Cemetery.

Hobson was panting a little, his fleshy, well-massaged face creased in annoyance. The walk through the cemetery had been no hardship to the slim, whipcord body of the Senator, but Hobson was not used to walking. Kennicott had felt that a stroll homeward from the banquet would calm his turbulent thoughts, excited by the innumerable activities of Memorial Day; and Hobson, anxious to settle the matter of the bill, had rather unwillingly decided to accompany him.

"It may bring us closer to war," the Senator said, breaking in sharply on Hobson's involved explanation.

"Not at all. It's merely preparedness." Hobson's sharp little eyes searched the other's face. "We must protect American interests in foreign countries. Surely——"

"But this is very—aggressive," Kennicott objected. "After all, we don't want the hatred of other countries."

"Oh, come now! That's going it a bit strong. I've already explained how——"

"But—war," the Senator said, looking absently at a tombstone in the distance.

"There'll be no war," Hobson insisted somewhat shrilly. "If I thought this bill were really dangerous I'd be the first to demand its withdrawal."

"How much do you stand to make out of it?" the Senator asked abruptly. "Well—never mind. That's scarcely a fair question. Can't we let this go till tomorrow, Hobson? I'm so utterly tired!"

Hobson stared at him for a moment. Then, choosing his words with care, he said, "The bill really should go through, Senator. I think it will—assure your securing the nomination next year."

Kennicott looked at him keenly, little lines bracketing his mouth. Hobson's support was valuable—in fact, indispensable. If he were to withdraw it——

Glancing sideways at his companion, the Senator almost walked into a shadowy, slim figure that stood quietly in the darkness beneath a tall elm.

A drawn, white face was turned to Kennicott, and he felt a sudden sense of shock at the agony in the dark, brooding eyes. It was a young man, almost a boy, with deep lines of pain etched in his face.

"I'm sorry," the Senator said quickly, glancing at the boy's faded, worn khaki uniform. "I didn't see you."

The boy made no answer, and the Senator made a tentative movement to pass on. Abruptly the youthful, haggard face was turned away, and the boy said in a muffled tone, "I can't sleep."

"Eh?" Kennicott stared.

"I say I can't sleep," the boy repeated, his voice dull with pain.

Hobson made a clucking sound of commiseration and glanced at the Senator.

Kennicott felt a surge of sympathy. The obvious youthfulness of the boy was so incongruous with his taut face, the white tortured line of his lips.

"I know," Kennicott said. "It can be terrible. I had insomnia for almost a week once."

"A week," the other said scornfully. "That's nothing. It's been ages——"

Kennicott was scribbling something on the back of an envelope. "Be with you in a minute," he said under his breath to Hobson, who was chafing at the delay. "Here—any druggist can fill this," he said, giving the paper to the boy. "It will fix you up if anything can. I know how you feel," he ended sympathetically.

The youth took it skeptically and thrust it into a pocket. "Thanks just the same," he said oddly. "It's always like this on Memorial Day—it's worse then, you know."

HOBSON moved impatiently, his pale eyes flickering uneasily over the boy's form.

"Oh," the Senator said understandingly. "I see—but—look here, aren't you rather young to——"

"Am I?" the youth asked. "I'm not so young as I look. I was in the war, all right."

Hobson gave a grunt of disbelief. Even the Senator felt that the boy was lying. True, his face was worn, haggard—but he couldn't be over twenty-five at most. Probably he didn't mean the World War. There were always battles going on—Manchuria, South America, Africa.

"Well—you get those powders," the Senator said after an awkward pause. "I'm sure they'll do the trick." He cleared his throat. "Can you use——" He drew out his wallet rather hesitantly, but the boy was not offended.

"No, thanks," he said, a boyish grin suddenly appearing on his face. Then it was gone, replaced by that strained expression of pain. He suddenly seemed to notice a low, gray tombstone near by, and took a few slow steps toward it. "Poor fool," he murmured very softly.

The Senator looked away quickly. It was a shock to hear Hobson's high-pitched, rasping voice. Had the man no intelligence, no decency? Kennicott put up a restraining hand, but it was too late.

"Oh—come, come," Hobson was saying. "Don't say a thing like that, son. It isn't right."

"Come on," Kennicott urged under his breath, but the boy interrupted him.

"Why not?" he asked, a sharp note in his tired young voice. "Wasn't he a fool?"

Hobson would try to argue with the boy, the Senator thought hopelessly. Couldn't he see that——

"You're too young. You don't understand what he died for—what his comrades died for," Hobson said, his plump face very earnest.

"Does it matter?" the boy asked very quietly. "They—died."

"They died for something very real," Hobson plowed on. "If they could——"

"For God's sake, come on," Kennicott snapped, grasping Hobson's arm. "Leave him alone. Can't you see——"

"All right," the boy said suddenly. "Maybe you're right. But—let me tell you a little story." He came closer, his eyes dark and tortured. "About a fellow who went over to France in '17. Just an ordinary fellow, I guess—who was scared stiff when the shells started bursting around, and the machine-guns were making their racket in the dark. But he was like the rest of the fellows. He didn't dare show how much he was afraid. A sniper got him in '18."

The Senator was uncomfortable and showed it, but to his disgust he saw that Hobson was preparing to answer the boy.

"Wait—let me finish. A sniper got him, I said, and that was fine. He didn't hear the bullets screaming over the trench, or the groaning of dying men; all the horrors were gone, and he was resting, forgetting. The darkness was kind . . . and then one day he awoke."

"Eh?" That was Hobson, frankly staring.

"I say he woke up. Glory woke him up—splendor and a stone monument that was very heavy. Bitter glory and squalid splendor," the boy went on fiercely. "They tortured and shamed him. You see, he was awake now, and he wanted—God!—how he wanted to *forget!*"

There were tears in the tortured eyes, and the boy brushed them away roughly with his sleeve. Then, catching his breath in a little gasp, he turned suddenly and began to walk quickly away.

For a heartbeat the Senator stood silent, unmoving, staring at that slim, khaki figure receding into the gloom. "Wait," he called.

"Let him go," Hobson said, an angry undercurrent in his voice. "You can't——"

But Kennicott was remembering that white, drawn face, those brooding eyes from which all the youthfulness had been drained. "No—I've got to——" he said in an inarticulate aside to Hobson and took a few hasty steps forward. He saw the pale blur that was the boy's face turned toward him briefly, and the slender figure increased its pace. Ignoring Hobson's remonstrances, the Senator began to hurry after the boy.

KENNICOTT had to exert himself to overtake his quarry, and was glad that his muscles were still firm and elastic. He saw the boy turn hastily down a side path, and broke into a run. For a hundred feet or so the path was very dark, and then it broadened out into a large clearing. At its edge Kennicott swept a searching glance around, and jerked abruptly to a halt. His jaw dropped.

A moment later Hobson pounded up, wheezing a little. He paused, scrutinizing Kennicott's face. "What's the matter?" he asked quickly.

The Senator did not answer, and Hobson repeated his question. Then Kennicott turned a startled, almost frightened face to his companion. "Did—did you see that?" he asked unsteadily.

"What?" Hobson glanced around. "The boy? He's gone."

"He's—yes, he's gone. Hobson, I—I saw——" He brushed a hand across his eyes. "Hobson—can a man *vanish?*"

"What?" Hobson stared, his mouth open. "A—a man——"

"But I saw it!" the Senator said earnestly, as though pleading for belief. "That boy—wasn't——" He pointed toward a great white block in the center of the clearing. "It was right there—I—I saw——" He could not finish.

"What are you talking about?" Hobson's voice was purposely crisp and peremptory. "You're all unnerved. Come on—the boy's gone. We can't stay here."

"You go on," Kennicott said suddenly. "I'm going to—stay here for a while."

Hobson hesitated. Then, making up his mind, he drew a paper from his pocket, held it out. "Here's the bill, then. I'll phone you tomorrow."

Kennicott made no move. He said dully, "The bill. No, no, I can't——"

"Look here," Hobson said furiously. "You're not going to act like a damned fool, are you? What the devil's the matter?"

The Senator turned to him a face of white marble and said nothing.

Hobson hesitated, and then his rage pushed aside his diplomacy, his caution.

"Because—by Heaven, I can break you," he snarled. "You're not President yet! I can ruin your career, and you know it."

"I know it," the Senator said quietly. "But that bill won't pass while I'm in the Senate." He turned his back on Hobson and stood silently gazing at the gaunt white mausoleum in the clearing. He had spoken patriotically and at length there not six hours before.

It was the tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

The Dead-Wagon*

By GREYE LA SPINA

"SOMEONE'S been chalking up the front door." The speaker stepped off the terrace into the library through the open French window.

From his padded armchair Lord Melverson rose with an involuntary exclamation of startled dismay.

"Chalking the great door?" he echoed, an unmistakable tremor in his restrained voice. His aristocratic, clean-shaven old face showed pallid in the soft light of the shaded candles.

"Oh, nothing that can do any harm to the carving. Perhaps I am mistaken—it's coming on dusk—but it seemed to be a great cross in red, chalked high up on the top panel of the door. You know—the Great Plague panel."

"Good God!" ejaculated the older man weakly.

Young Dinsmore met his prospective father-in-law's anxious eyes with a face that betrayed his astonishment. He could not avoid marveling at the reception of what certainly seemed, on the surface, a trifling matter.

To be sure, the wonderfully carved door that, with reinforcements of hand-wrought iron, guarded the entrance to Melverson Abbey was well worth any amount of care. Lord Melverson's ill-concealed agitation would have been excusable had a tourist cut vandal initials on that admirable example of early carving. But to make such a fuss over a bit of red chalk that a servant could wipe off in a moment without injury to the panel —Kenneth felt slightly superior to such anxiety on the part of Arline's father.

Lord Melverson steadied himself with one hand against the library table.

*From WEIRD TALES for September, 1927

"Was there—did you notice—anything else—besides the cross?"

"Why, I don't think there was anything else. Of course, I didn't look particularly. I had no idea you'd be so—interested," returned the young American.

"I think I'll go out and take a look at it myself. You may have imagined you saw some things, in the dusk," murmured Lord Melverson half to himself.

"May I come?" inquired Dinsmore, vaguely disturbed at the very apparent discomposure of his usually imperturbable host.

Lord Melverson nodded. "I suppose you'll have to hear the whole story sooner or later, anyway," he acquiesced as he led the way.

His words sent Kenneth's heart to beating madly. They meant but one thing; Arline's father was not averse to his suit. As for Arline, no one could be sure of such a little coquette. And yet—the young American could have sworn there was more than ordinary kindness in her eyes the day she smiled a confirmation of her father's invitation to Melverson Abbey. It was that vague promise that had brought Kenneth Dinsmore from New York to England.

A moment later, the American was staring, with straining eyes that registered utter astonishment, at the famous carved door that formed the principal entrance to the abbey. He would have been willing to swear that no one could have approached that door without having been seen from the library windows; yet in the few seconds of time that had elapsed between his first and second observation of the panel, an addition had been made to the chalk marks.

THE Melverson panels are well known in the annals of historic carvings. There is a large lower panel showing the Great Fire of London. Above this are six half-panels portraying important scenes in London's history. And running across the very top is a large panel which shows a London street during the Great Plague of 1664.

This panel shows houses on either side of a narrow street yawning vacantly, great crosses upon their doors. Before one in the foreground is a rude wooden cart drawn by a lean nag and driven by a saturnine individual with leering face. This cart carries a gruesome load; it is piled high with bodies. Accounts vary oddly as to the number of bodies in the cart; earlier descriptions of the panel give a smaller number than the later ones, an item much speculated upon by connoisseurs of old carvings. The *tout ensemble* of the bas-relief greatly resembles the famous Hogarth picture of a similar scene.

Before this great door Kenneth stood, staring at a red-chalked legend traced across the rough surface of the carved figures on the upper panel. "God have mercy upon us!" it read. What did it mean? Who had managed to trace, unseen, those words of despairing supplication upon the old door?

And suddenly the young man's wonderment was rudely disturbed. Lord Melverson lurched away from the great door like a drunken man, a groan forcing its way from between his parched lips. The old man's hands had flown to his face, covering his eyes as though to shut out some horrid and unwelcome sight.

"Kenneth, you have heard the story! This is some thoughtless jest of yours! Tell me it is, boy! Tell me that your hand traced these fatal words!"

Dinsmore's sympathy was keenly aroused by the old nobleman's intense gravity and anxiety but he was forced to deny the pitifully pleading accusation.

"Sorry, sir, but I found the red cross

just as I told you. As for the writing below, I must admit——"

"Ah! Then you *did* put *that* there? It was you who did it, then? Thank God! Thank God!"

"No, no, I hadn't finished. I was only wondering how anyone could have slipped past us and have written this, unseen. I'm sure," puzzled, "there was nothing here but the red cross when I told you about it first, sir."

"Then you haven't heard—no one has told you that old legend? The story of the Melverson curse?"

"This is the first I've heard of it, I assure you."

"And you positively deny writing that, as a bit of a joke?"

"Come, sir, it's not like you to accuse me of such a silly piece of cheap trickery," Kenneth retorted, somewhat indignantly.

"Forgive me, boy. I—I should not have said that but—I am—agitated. Will you tell me"—his voice grew tenser—"look closely, for God's sake, Kenneth!—*how many bodies are there in the wagon?*"

Dinsmore could not help throwing a keen glance at his future father-in-law, who now stood with averted face, one hand shielding his eyes as though he dared not ascertain for himself that which he asked another in a voice so full of shrinking dread. Then the American stepped closer to the door and examined the upper panel closely, while the soft dusk closed down upon it.

"There are eleven bodies," he said finally.

"Kenneth! Look carefully! More depends upon your reply than you can be aware. Are you sure there are only eleven?"

"There are only eleven, sir. I'm positive of it."

"Don't make a mistake, for pity's sake!"

"Surely my eyesight hasn't been seriously impaired since this morning, when I bagged my share of birds," laughed the young man, in a vain effort to throw off the gloomy depression that seemed to have settled down upon him from the mere propinquity of the other.

"Thank God! Then there is still time," murmured the owner of the abbey brokenly, drawing a deep, shivering sigh of relief. "Let us return to the house, my boy." His voice had lost its usually light ironical inflection and had acquired a heaviness foreign to it.

Kenneth contracted his brows at Lord Melverson's dragging steps. One would almost have thought the old man physically affected by what appeared to be a powerful shock.

Once back in the library, Lord Melverson collapsed into the nearest chair, his breath coming in short, forced jerks. Wordlessly he indicated the bell-pull dangling against the wall out of his reach.

Kenneth jerked the cord. After a moment, during which the young man hastily poured a glassful of water and carried it to his host, the butler came into the room.

At sight of his beloved master in such a condition of pitiful collapse, the gray-haired old servitor was galvanized into action. He flew across the room to the desk, opened a drawer, picked up a bottle, shook a tablet out into his hand, flew back.

He administered the medicine to his master, who sipped the water brought by Kenneth with a grateful smile that included his guest and his servant.

Jenning shook his head sadly, compressing his lips, as Lord Melverson leaned back exhausted in his chair, face grayish, lids drooping over weary eyes.

Kenneth touched the old servant's arm to attract his attention. Then he tapped his left breast and lifted his eyebrows questioningly. An affirmative nod was his reply. Heart trouble! Brought on by the old gentleman's agitation over a chalk mark on his front door! There was a mystery somewhere, and the very idea stimulated curiosity. And had not Lord Melverson said, "You will have to know, sooner or later"? Know what? What strange thing lay back of a red cross and a prayer to heaven, chalked upon the great Melverson portal?

2

LORD MELVERSON stirred ever so little and spoke with effort. "Send one of the men out to clean the upper panel of the front door, Jenning," he ordered tonelessly.

Jenning threw up one hand to cover his horrified mouth and stifle an exclamation. His faded blue eyes peered at his master from under pale eyebrows as he stared with dreadful incredulity.

"It isn't the red cross, m'lord? Oh, no, it cannot be the red cross?" he stammered.

The thrill of affection in that cracked old voice told a little something of how much his master meant to the old family retainer.

"It seems to be a cross, chalked in red," admitted Melverson with patent reluctance, raising dull eyes to the staring ones fixed upon him with consternation.

"Oh, m'lord, not the red cross! And—was the warning there? Yes? Did you count them? *How many were there?*"

Terrible foreboding, shrinking reluctance, rang in that inquiry, so utterly strange and incomprehensible. Kenneth felt his blood congeal in his veins with the horrid mystery of it.

Lord Melverson and his retainer exchanged a significant glance that did not escape the young American's attention. The answer to Jenning's question was cryptic but not more so than the inquiry.

"The same as before, Jenning. That is all—*as yet.*"

Kenneth's curiosity flamed up anew. What could that mean? Could Jenning have been inquiring how many bodies were in the cart? There would be eleven, of course. How could there be more, or less, when the wood-carver had made them eleven, for all time?

The old servant retired from the room, dragging one slow foot after the other as though he had suddenly aged more than his fast-whitening hairs warranted.

In his capacious armchair, fingers opening and closing nervously upon the polished leather that upholstered it, Lord Melverson leaned back wearily, his eyes wide open but fixed unseeingly upon the library walls with their great paintings in oil by bygone Melversons.

"Kenneth!" Lord Melverson sought his guest's eyes with an expression of apology on his face that was painfully forced to the surface of the clouded atmosphere of dread and heaviness in which the old nobleman seemed steeped. "I presume you are wondering over the to-do about a chalk mark on my door? It—it made me think—of an old family tradition—and disturbed me a little.

"There's just one thing I want to ask you, my boy. Arline must not know that I had this little attack of heart-failure. I've kept it from her for years and I don't want her disturbed about me. And Kenneth, Arline has never been told the family legend. Don't tell her about the cross—the chalk marks on my door." His voice was intensely grave. "I have your word, my boy? Thank you. Some day I'll tell you the whole story."

"Has it anything to do with the quaint verse in raised gilded letters over the fire-

place in the dining-hall?" questioned Kenneth.

He quoted it:

> "Melverson's first-born will die early away;
> Melverson's daughters will wed in gray;
> Melverson's curse must Melverson pay,
> Or Melverson Abbey will ownerless stay."

"Sounds like doggerel, doesn't it, lad? Well, that's the ancient curse. Foolish? Perhaps it is—perhaps it is. Yet—I am a second son myself; my brother Guy died before his majority."

"Coincidence, don't you think, sir?"

Lord Melverson smiled wryly, unutterable weariness in his old eyes. "Possibly—but a chain of coincidences, then. You—you don't believe there could be anything in it, do you, Kenneth? Would you marry the daughter of a house with such a curse upon it, knowing that it was part of your wife's dowry? Knowing that your first-born son must die before his majority?"

The American laughed light-heartedly.

"I don't think I'd care to answer such a suppositious question, sir. I can't admit such a possibility. I'm far too matter-of-fact, you see."

"But would you?" persistently, doggedly.

"I don't believe a word of it," sturdily. "It's just one of those foolish superstitions that people have permitted to influence them from time immemorial. I refuse to credit it."

Did Kenneth imagine it, or did Lord Melverson heave a deep, carefully repressed sigh of relief?

"Hardly worth while to go over the old tradition, is it?" he asked eagerly. "You wouldn't believe it, anyway. And probably it is just superstition, as you say. Ring for Jenning again, will you? Or—do you want to lend me your arm, my boy? I—I feel a bit shaky yet. I rather think bed will be the best place for me."

3

After Kenneth had bidden Lord Melverson good-night, he got out his pipe and sat by his window smoking. Tomorrow, he decided, he would try his fate; if he could only get Arline away where they could be alone. Little witch, how she managed always to have someone else around! Tomorrow he would know from her own lips whether or not he must return to America alone.

The clock struck midnight. Following close upon its cadences, a voice sounded on the still night, a voice raucous, grating, disagreeable. The words were indistinguishable and followed by a hard chuckle that was distinctly not expressive of mirth; far from it, the sound made Kenneth shake back his shoulders quickly, in an instinctive effort to throw off the dismal effect of that laugh.

"Charming music!" observed he to himself, as he leaned from his window.

Wheels began to grate and crunch through the graveled road that led around the abbey. The full moon threw her clear light upon the space directly under Kenneth's window. He could distinguish every object as distinctly, it seemed to him, as in broad daylight. He listened and watched, a strange tenseness upon him. It was as though he waited for something terrible which yet must be; some unknown peril that threatened vaguely but none the less dreadfully.

The noise of the wheels grew louder. Then came a cautious, scraping sound from the window of a room close at hand. Kenneth decided that it was Lord Melverson's room. His host, hearing the horrid laughter that had been flung dismally upon the soft night air, had removed the screen from his window, the better to view the night visitor with the ugly chuckle.

The grinding of wheels grew louder,

And then there slid into the full length of the moon a rude cart drawn by a lean, dappled nag and driven by a hunched-up individual who drew rein as the wagon came directly under Lord Melverson's window.

From the shadow of his room, Kenneth stared, open-eyed. There was something intolerably appalling about that strange equipage and its hunched-up driver, something that set his teeth sharply on edge and lifted his hair stiffly on his head. He did not want to look, but something pushed him forward and he was obliged to.

With a quick motion of his head, the driver turned a saturnine face to the moon's rays, revealing glittering eyes that shone with terrible, concentrated malignancy. The thinly curling lips parted. The cry Kenneth had heard a few minutes earlier rang—or rather, grated—on the American's ear. This time the words were plainer; plainer to the ear, although not to the sense—for what sense could they have? he reasoned as he heard them.

"Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead!"

A stifled groan. That was Lord Melverson, thought Kenneth, straining his eyes to watch the strange scene below.

For suddenly there rose from out the shadow of the abbey's great gray walls two figures bearing between them a burden. They carried it to the cart and with an effort lifted it, to toss it carelessly upon the grisly contents of that horrid wagon — contents that Kenneth now noted for the first time with starting eyes and prickling skin. And as the white face of the body lay upturned to the moon, a terrible cry wailed out from Lord Melverson's apartment, a cry of anguish and despair. For the moon's light picked out the features of that dead so callously tossed upon the gruesome pile.

"Oh, Albert, Albert, my son, my son!"

Kenneth leaned from his window and peered toward that of his host. From above the sill protruded two clasped hands; between them lay the white head of the old man. Had he fainted? Or had he had another attack of heart-failure?

The driver in the roadway below chuckled malignantly, and pulled at his horse's reins. The lean, dappled nag started up patiently in answer, and the cart passed slowly out of sight, wheels biting deep into the road-bed. And as it went out of sight among the deep shadows cast by the thickly wooded park, that harsh chuckle floated back again to the American's ears, thrilling him with horror of that detestable individual.

The hypnotic influence of that malignant glance had so chained Kenneth to the spot that for the moment he could not go to the assistance of Lord Melverson. But he found that he had been anticipated; as he reached his door, Jenning was already disappearing into his host's room. Kenneth retreated, unseen; perhaps he would do better to wait until he was called. It might well be that the drama he had seen enacted was not meant for his eyes and ears.

After all, had he seen or heard anything? Or was he the victim of a nightmare that had awakened him at its end? Kenneth shrugged his shoulders. He would know in the morning. Unless it rained hard in the meantime, the wheels of the cart would have left their mark on the gravel. If he had not dreamed, he would find the ruts made by those broad, ancient-looking wheels.

He could not sleep, however, until he heard Jenning leave his master's room. Opening the door softly, he inquired how Lord Melverson was. The old servitor flung a suspicious glance at him.

"I heard him cry out," explained Kenneth, seeing that the old man was

averse to any explanation on his own side. "I hope it is nothing serious?"

"Nothing," replied Jenning restrainedly. But Dinsmore could have sworn that bright tears glittered in the old retainer's faded blue eyes and that the old mouth was compressed as though to hold back an outburst of powerful emotion.

Arline Melverson, her face slightly clouded, reported that her father had slept poorly the night before and would breakfast in his own room. She herself came down in riding-habit and vouchsafed the welcome information that she had ordered a horse saddled for Kenneth, if he cared to ride with her. Despite his desire to be alone with her, the American felt that he ought to remain at the abbey, where he might be of service to Lord Melverson. But inclination overpowered intuition, and after breakfast he got into riding-togs.

"I believe I'm still dreaming," he thought to himself as he rode back to the abbey at lunch-time, his horse crowding against Arline's as he reached happily over to touch her hand every little while. "Only this dream isn't a nightmare."

Instinctively his glance sought the graveled road where the dead-cart of the night before had, under his very eyes, ground its heavy wheels into the ground. The road was smooth and rutless. After all, then, he had dreamed and had undoubtedly been awakened by Lord Melverson's cry as the old man fainted. The dream had been so vivid that Kenneth could hardly believe his eyes when he looked at the smooth roadway, but his new happiness soon chased his bewilderment away.

As the young people dismounted before the door, Jenning appeared upon the threshold. The old man's lined face was turned almost with terror upon his young mistress. His lips worked as though he would speak but could not. His eyes sought the other man's as if in supplication.

"What's the matter, Jenning?"

"Master Albert, Mr. Dinsmore! M'lord's first-born son!"

"What is it?" Arline echoed. "Is my brother here?"

"I can't tell her, sir," the major-domo implored of Kenneth. "Take her to Lord Melverson, sir, I beg of you. He can tell her better than I."

Kenneth did not take Arline to her father. The girl fled across the great hall as if whipped by a thousand fears. Kenneth turned to Jenning with a question in his eyes.

Down the old man's face tears ran freely. His wrinkled hands worked nervously together. "He fell, sir. Something broke on his plane. He died last night, sir, a bit after midnight. The telegram came this morning, just after you and Miss Arline went."

Kenneth, one hand pressed bewildered to his forehead, walked aimlessly through that house of sorrow. Albert Melverson had fallen from his plane and died, the previous night. Had that dream, that nightmare, been a warning? Had it perhaps been so vivid in Lord Melverson's imagination that the scene had been telepathically reproduced before the American's own eyes? Although puzzled and disturbed beyond words, Kenneth realized that the matter must rest in abeyance until Lord Melverson should of his own free will explain it.

In the meantime there would be Arline to comfort, his sweetheart, who had just lost her dearly loved and only brother.

4

Two months had hardly passed after Albert's death before Lord Melverson broached the subject of his daughter's marriage.

"It's this way, my boy. I'm an old man and far from well of late. I'd like to know that Arline was in safe keeping, Kenneth," and he laid an affectionate hand on the young man's shoulder.

Kenneth was deeply affected. "Thank you, sir. I promise you I shall do my utmost to make her happy."

"I know you will. I want you to speak to Arline about an early wedding. Tell her I want to see her married before—before I have to leave. I have a very powerful reason that I cannot tell you, my boy, for Arline to marry soon. I want to live to see my grandson at her knee, lad. And unless you two marry soon, I shall be powerless to prevent—that is, I shall be unable to do something for you both that has been much in my mind of late. It is vital that you marry soon, Kenneth. More I cannot say."

"You don't need to say more. I'll speak to Arline today. You understand, sir, that my only motive in not urging marriage upon her now has been your recent bereavement?"

"Of course. But Arline is too young, too volatile, to allow even such a loss to weigh permanently upon her spirits. I think she will yield to you, especially if you make it plain that I want it to be so."

Kenneth sought Arline thoughtfully. Lord Melverson's words impressed him almost painfully. There was much behind them, much that he realized he could not yet demand an explanation of. But the strength of Lord Melverson's request made him surer when he asked Arline to set an early date for their marriage.

"I am ready if Father does not consider it disrespectful to Albert's memory, Kenneth. You know, dear, we intended to marry soon, anyway. And I think Albert will be happier to know that I did not let his going matter. You understand, don't you? Besides, I feel that he is here with us in the abbey, with Father and me.

"But there is one thing, dear, that I shall insist upon. I think too much of my brother to lay aside the light mourning that Father permitted me to wear instead of heavy black. So if you want me to marry you soon, dear, you must wed a bride in gray."

Into Kenneth's mind flashed one line of the Melverson curse:

"Melverson's daughters will wed in gray."

Could there be something in it, after all? Common sense answered scornfully: No!

Four months after Albert Melverson had fallen to his death, his sister Arline—gray-clad like a gentle dove—put her hand into that of Kenneth Dinsmore, while Lord Melverson, his lips twitching as he strove to maintain his composure, gave the bride away.

A honeymoon trip that consumed many months took the young people to America as well as to the Continent, as the groom could hardly wait to present his lovely young wife to his family. Then, pursuant to Lord Melverson's wishes, the bridal pair returned to Melverson Abbey, that the future heir might be born under the ancestral roof.

5

Little Albert became the apple of his grandfather's eye. The old gentleman spent hours watching the cradle the first few months of his grandson's life, and then again other hours in fondly guiding the little fellow's first steps.

But always in the background of this apparently ideally happy family lurked a black shadow. Jenning, his pale eyes full of foreboding, was always stealing terrified looks in secret at the panel of the great door. Kenneth grew almost to

hate the poor old man, merely because he knew that Jenning believed implicitly in the family curse.

"Confound the man! He'll bring it upon us by thinking about it," growled the young father one morning as he looked out of the window of the breakfast room, where he had been eating a belated meal.

Little Albert, toddling with exaggerated precaution from his mother's outstretched hands to those of his grandfather, happened to look up. He saw his father; laughed and crowed lustily. Dinsmore waved his hand.

"Go to it, young chap. You'll be a great walker some day," he called facetiously.

Lord Melverson looked around, a pleased smile on his face. Plainly, he agreed to the full with his son-in-law's sentiments.

As usual, entered that black-garbed figure, the very presentment of woe: Jenning. Into the center of the happy little circle he came, his eyes seeking the old nobleman's.

"M'lord! Would your lordship please take a look?" stammered Jenning, his roving eyes going from the young father to the young mother, then back to the grandfather again, as if in an agony of uncertainty.

Lord Melverson straightened up slowly and carefully from his bent position over the side of a great wicker chair. He motioned Jenning silently ahead of him. The old butler retraced his footsteps, his master following close upon his heels. They disappeared around the corner of the building.

"Now, what on earth are they up to?" wondered Kenneth. His brow contracted. There had been something vaguely sus-

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picious about Lord Melverson's air. "I've half a mind to follow them."

"Kenneth!" Arline's cry was wrung agonizingly from her.

Kenneth whirled about quickly, but too late to do anything. The baby, toddling to his mother's arms, missed a step, slipped, fell. The tender little head crashed against the granite coping at the edge of the terrace.

And even then Kenneth did not realize what it all meant. It was not until late that night that he suddenly understood that the Melverson curse was not a silly tradition, but a terrible blight upon the happiness of the Melverson family, root and branch.

He had left Arline under the influence of a sleeping-potion. Her nerves had gone back on her after the day's strain and the knowledge that her baby might not live out the night. A competent nurse and a skilled physician had taken over the case. Specialists were coming down from London as fast as a special train would bring them. Kenneth felt that his presence in the sickroom would be more hindrance than help.

He went down to the library where his father-in-law sat grimly, silently, expectantly, a strangely fixed expression of determination on his fine old face. Lord Melverson had drawn a handkerchief from his pocket. And then Kenneth suddenly knew, where before he had only imagined. For the old man's fine cambric kerchief was streaked with red, red that the unhappy young father knew must have been wiped from the upper panel of the great door that very morning. *The baby, Kenneth's first-born son, was doomed.*

"Why didn't you tell me? You hid it from me," he accused his wife's father, bitterly.

"I thought I was doing it for the best, Kenneth," the older man defended himself sadly.

"But if you had told me, I would never have left him alone for a single moment. I would have been beside him to have saved him when he fell."

"You *know* that if he had not fallen, something else would have happened to him, something unforeseen."

"Oh yes, I know, now, when it is too late. My little boy! My Arline's first-born! The first-born of Melverson!" fiercely. "Why didn't you tell me that the Melverson curse would follow my wife? That it would strike down her first-born boy?"

"And would that have deterred you from marrying Arline?" inquired Arline's father, very gently. "You know it wouldn't, Kenneth. I tried to put a hypothetical case to you once, but you replied that you refused to consider the mere possibility. What was I to do? I will confess that I have suffered, thinking that I should have insisted upon your reading the family records before you married Arline—then you could have decided for yourself."

"Does Arline know?"

"No. I've shielded her from the knowledge, Kenneth."

"I can't forgive you for not letting me know. It might have saved Albert's life. If Arline, too, had known——"

"Why should I have told her something that would have cast a shadow over her young life, Kenneth? Are you reproaching me because I have tried to keep her happy?"

"Oh, Father, I didn't mean to reproach you. I'm sorry. You must understand that I'm half mad with the pain of what's happened, not only on account of the little fellow, but for Arline. Oh, if there were only some way of saving him! How I would bless the being who would tell me how to save him!"

Lord Melverson, still with that strange glow in his eyes, rose slowly to his feet.

"There is a way, I believe," said he. "But don't put too much stress on what may be but a groundless hope on my part. I have had an idea for some time that I shall put into expression tonight, Kenneth. I've been thinking it over since I felt that I had wronged you in not pressing home the reality of the Melverson curse. If my idea is a good one, our little Albert is saved. And not only he, but I too shall have broken the curse, rendered it impotent for ever." His eyes shone with fervor.

"Is it anything I can do?" the young father begged.

"Nothing. Unless, perhaps, you want to read the old manuscript in my desk drawer. It tells why we Melversons have been cursed since the days of the Great Plague of 1664.

"Just before midnight, be in little Albert's room. If he is no better when the clock strikes twelve, Kenneth—why, then, my plan will have been a poor one. But I shall have done all I can do; have given all that lies in my power to give, in my attempt to wipe out the wrong I have inadvertently done you."

Kenneth pressed the hand outstretched to him.

"You've been a good husband to my girl, Kenneth, lad. You've made her happy. And, in case anything were to happen to me, will you tell Arline that I am perfectly contented if only our little one recovers? I want no vain regrets," stressed Lord Melverson emphatically, as he released Kenneth's hand and turned to leave the room.

"What could happen?"

"Oh, nothing. That is—you know I've had several severe heart attacks of late," returned Arline's father vaguely.

BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.
Feb.	....	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.
....	....	Mar.	Mar.	Mar.	Mar.
Apr.	....	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.	
....	....	May	May	May	
June	....	June	June	June	
....	July	July	July	July	
Aug.	....	....	....	....	
....	....	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	
....	....	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	
....	....	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	
Dec.	....	Dec.	Dec.	Dec.	

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6

KENNETH, alone, went to his father-in-law's desk and drew out the stained and yellow manuscript. Sitting in a chair before the desk, he laid the ancient sheets before him and pored over the story of the Melverson curse. He thought it might take his mind off the tragedy slowly playing to a close in the hushed room upstairs.

Back in 1664, the then Lord Melverson fell madly in love with the charming daughter of a goldsmith. She was an only child, very lovely to look upon and as good as she was fair, and she dearly loved the rollicking young nobleman. But a Melverson of Melverson Abbey, though he could love, could not wed a child of the people. Charles Melverson pleaded with the lovely girl to elope with him, without the sanction of her church.

But the damsel, being of lofty soul, called her father and related all to him. Then she turned her fair shoulder indifferently upon her astonished and chagrined suitor and left him, while the goldsmith laughed saturninely in the would-be seducer's face.

A Melverson was not one to let such a matter rest quietly, however, especially as he was deeply enamored of the lady. He sent pleading letters, threatening to take his own life. He attempted to force himself into the lady's presence. At last, he met her one day as she returned from church, caught her up, and fled with her on his swift charger.

Still she remained obdurate, although love for him was eating her wounded heart. Receive him she must, but she continued to refuse him so little a favor as a single word.

Despairing of winning her by gentle means, Charles Melverson determined upon foul.

It was the terrible winter of 1664-5. The Black Death, sweeping through London and out into the countryside, was taking dreadful toll of lives. Hundreds of bodies were daily tumbled carelessly into the common trenches by hardened men who dared the horrors of the plague for the big pay offered those who played the part of grave-digger. And at the very moment when Melverson had arrived at his evil decision, the goldsmith staggered into the abbey grounds after a long search for his ravished daughter, to fall under the very window where she had retreated in the last stand for her maiden virtue.

Retainers without shouted at one another to beware the plague-stricken man. Their shouts distracted the maiden. She looked down and beheld her father dying, suffering the last throes of the dreaded pestilence.

Coldly and proudly she demanded freedom to go down to her dying parent. Melverson refused the request; in a flash of insight he knew what she would do with her liberty. She would fling herself desperately beside the dying man; she would hold his blackening body against her own warm young breast; she would deliberately drink in his plague-laden breath with her sweet, fresh lips.

Lifting fast-glazing eyes, the goldsmith saw his daughter, apparently clasped fast in her lover's arms. How was he to have known that her frantic struggles had been in vain? With his last breath he cursed the Melversons, root and branch, lifting discolored hands to the brazen, glowing sky lowering upon him. Then, "And may the demon of the plague grant that I may come back as long as a Melverson draws breath, to steal away his first-born son!" he cried. With a groan, he died.

And then, thanks to the strange heart of woman, Charles Melverson unexpectedly won what he had believed lost to him for ever, for he could not have

forced his will upon that orphaned and sorrowful maiden. The goldsmith's daughter turned upon him limpid eyes that wept for him and for her father, too.

"It is too much to ask that you should suffer alone what my poor father has called down upon your house," she said to him, with unexpected gentleness. "He would forgive you, could he know that I have been safe in your keeping. I must ask you, then, to take all I have to give, if by so doing you believe the shadow of the curse will be lightened—for you, at least."

Touched to his very heart by her magnanimity, Charles Melverson released her from his arms, knelt at her feet, kissed her hand, and swore that until he could fetch her from the church, his lawful wedded wife, he would neither eat nor sleep.

But—the curse remained. Down through the centuries it had worked its evil way, and no one seemed to have found a way of eluding it. Upon the last pages of the old manuscript were noted, in differing chirography, the death dates of one Melverson after another, after each the terribly illuminating note: "First-born son. Died before his majority."

And last of all, in the handwriting of Lord Melverson, was written the name of that Albert for whom Kenneth Dinsmore's son had been named. Must another Albert follow that other so soon?

7

KENNETH tossed the stained papers back into the drawer and shut them from sight. There was something sinister about them. He felt as if his very hands had been polluted by their touch. Then he glanced at the clock. It was on the point of striking midnight. He remembered Lord Melverson's request, and ran quickly upstairs to his little dying son's room.

Arline was already at the child's side; she had wakened and would not be denied. Nurse and physician stood in the background, their faces showing plainly the hopelessness of the case.

On his little pillow, the poor baby drew short, painful gasps, little fists clenched against his breast. A few short

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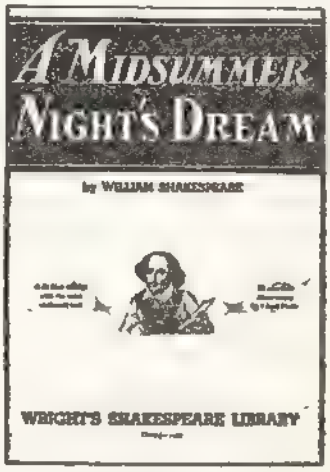

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moments, thought Kenneth, would determine his first-born's life or death. And it would be death, unless Lord Melverson had discovered how to break the potency of the Melverson curse.

Torn between wife and child, the young father dared not hope, for fear his hope might be shattered. As for Arline, he saw that her eyes already registered despair; already she had, in anticipation, given up her child, her baby, her first-born.

What was that? The sound of heavy, broad-rimmed wheels crunching through the gravel of the roadway; the call of a mocking voice that set Kenneth's teeth on edge with impotent fury.

He went unobtrusively to the window and looked out. After all, he could not be expected to stand by the bed, watching his little son die. And he had to see, at all costs, that nightmare dead-cart with its ghastly freight; he had to know whether or not he had dreamed it, or had seen it truly, on the night before Albert Melverson's death.

Coming out of the shadows of the enveloping trees, rumbled the dead-wagon with its hunched-up driver. Kenneth's hair rose with a prickling sensation on his scalp. He turned to glance back into the room. No, he was not dreaming; he had not dreamed before; it was real—as real as such a ghastly thing could well be.

On, on it came. And then the hateful driver lifted his malignant face to the full light of the moon. His challenging glance met the young father's intent gaze with a scoffing, triumphant smile, a smile of satisfied hatred. The thin lips parted, and their grating cry fell another time upon the heavy silence of the night.

"Bring out your dead!"

As that ominous cry pounded against his ears, Kenneth Dinsmore heard yet another sound: it was the sharp explosion of a revolver.

He stared from the window with straining eyes. Useless to return to the baby's bedside; would not those ghostly pall-bearers emerge from the shadows now, bearing with them the tiny body of his first-born?

They came. But they were carrying what seemed to be a heavy burden. That was no child's tiny form they tossed with hideous upward grins upon the dead-cart.

"Kenneth! Come here!"

It was Arline's voice, with a thrilling undertone of thankfulness in it that whirled Kenneth from the window to her side, all else forgotten.

"Look! He is breathing easier. Doctor, look! Tell me, doesn't he seem better?"

Doctor and nurse exchanged mystified, incredulous glances. It was plain that neither had heard or seen anything out of the ordinary that night, but that the baby's sudden turn for the better had astonished them both.

"I consider it little short of a miracle," pronounced the medical man, after a short examination of the sleeping child. "Madam, your child will live. I congratulate you both."

"Oh, I must tell Father, Kenneth. He will be *so* happy. Dear Father!"

The cold hand of certain knowledge squeezed Kenneth's heart. "If anything should happen to me," Lord Melverson had said. What did that revolver shot mean? What had meant that body the ghostly pall-bearers had carried to the dead-wagon?

A light tap came at the door. The nurse opened it, then turned and beckoned to Kenneth.

It was Jenning, frankly unashamed of the tears that were rolling down his wrinkled cheeks. He choked back a sob.

"He's gone, Mr. Dinsmore. Break it to her easy, sir—but it's proud of him she ought to be." His voice trembled, broke. " 'Twas not the little master *they* carried away in the accursed dead-cart, thanks to him. I tried to stop him, sir; forgive me, I loved him! But he *would* make the sacrifice; he said it was worth trying. And so—he—did—it. But—*he's broken the curse, sir, he's broken the curse!*"

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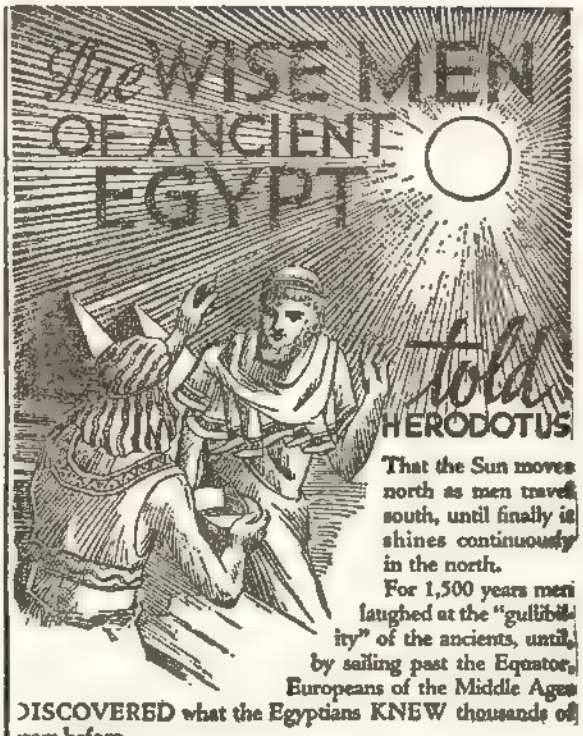

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WILLIS CONOVER, JR., who is editor of *Science-Fantasy Correspondent,* writes us that his delectable fan magazine has taken over *Fantasy Magazine* and combined it with *Science-Fantasy Correspondent,* which for long has been the leading fan magazine for science-fiction and weird-fiction. He offers a free copy to each of the first five hundred WEIRD TALES readers who request a copy of the new issue, mentioning this notice as their source of information. The cover is attractively illustrated with a line drawing by Virgil Finlay. Mr. Conover's address is 27 High St., Cambridge, Maryland.

Spooky Ghost Stories

R. K. Johnston, of Los Angeles, writes: "I read my first copy of WEIRD TALES ten or twelve years ago while on night duty in a hospital morgue. At first the stories were so darn scary that even the 'stiffs' in my charge seemed to be nervous. I continued reading WEIRD TALES for four or five years until I got sick and tired of so many werewolf and scientific stories that I quit. Yesterday I was attracted by the cover of the February issue. I bought it. Not only did I read every story in it, but I enjoyed every one. . . . Let us have some real good spooky ghost stories. I haven't had a thrill since I accidentally got in bed with a corpse I mistook for my roommate."

"Quietly Mad"

H. Sivia, of Palestine, Texas, writes: "I have at long last finished reading the February issue. Due to a severe cold spell, terrific rains, ice everywhere, etc., this little city was without electricity for three days. During that time I read WT by lamp and candle light, these adding much to the eery atmosphere; and I must say there wasn't a bad story in the entire copy. Two things drove me, as Woollcott would say, 'quietly mad.' First, Edgar Daniel Kramer's poem, *Dead Singer,* a lovely, unforgettable piece; second, Virgil Finlay's illustration for Howard's *Dig Me No Grave.* Both extremely swell. Owen's *The Poppy Pearl* is, to say the least, unique and nicely written. I like to read over and over again Fetia's little bit of dying philosophy on page 212. My choice for the best yarn in the issue is Kuttner's *I, the Vampire.* And, as usual, the filler shorts are good. Of them I'll take Prout's *Masquerade.* Why not reprint some stories like Algernon Blackwood's *The Wendigo,* or *Groot's Macaw* by Gouverneur Morris, or *The Screaming Skull* by F. Marion Crawford? These are all of the weird type and, noting your reprint policy does not apply only to stories printed first in WEIRD TALES, why not, if possible, give us some like these?"

The February Cover

Richard F. Jamison, of Valley Park, Missouri, writes: "Congratulations on the weirdest cover since Senf's *Bride of Dewer* illustration 'way back in the dim past of 1930. This finding of Finlay is one of the best things that ever happened to WEIRD. He and Rankin are the only two artists who seem capable of producing a truly weird effect in their illustrations. However, Rankin relies on vague formlessness for his results, while Finlay does that which is infinitely harder: actually reveals his horrors clear-cut. What a treat it would be to see Lovecraft's next masterpiece graced with a cover by Virgil Finlay!"

The Passing of Conan

H. Warner Munn, author of *The Werewolf of Ponkert,* writes from Athol, Massachusetts: "With others I mourn the passing

of Robert Howard. I have noticed in the Eyrie suggestions that the stories of Conan be continued by other authors. I believe that would be a mistake. Of course, the rich and colorful lands of historical mythology, Aquilonia, dark Khemi, barbarous Cimmeria and Gunderland, which Howard described so well, are settings open to the use of all. Without the borrowings from one another, writers of weird fiction would soon come to a dead end. Lovecraft's Elder Gods have spawned a fertile progeny; the *Necronomicon* has suggested a long shelf full of unhallowed tomes. . . . But a character is the author's own child, and must die with its creator. I am aware that this has not always been so. Dumas, Verne, Arthur de Howden Smith, and many others, have continued the lives of famous characters created by others. The characters move, talk, do daring deeds, but do not live. They are literary zombies. The soul is gone. Let writers play and wander as they will in Howard's fascinating lands. Let other explorers adventure there, meet love and hatred, and horrors unknown elsewhere. But Conan rides no more against Aquilonia. He has gone with his maker to yet more distant lands where there can be no returning. I would like also to express my appreciation of the work of Robert Bloch. I have watched him grow and have admired his firmer grasp upon his subjects. I noticed criticism of his treatment of that deeply interesting tale of the Druids. There seems to be an idea that he took too much space in developing his central theme, the legend. The story would have been slight without it, for the climax was not extraordinary. It was the legend of the persistency of Druid lore and old ways not forgotten, that made the story fine for me. I hope to see more of Bloch's writings. I need say little of my pleasure at finding Lovecraft active again. It seems like old times returned. Whatever his subject, it is always well chosen, and should it be hackneyed, his treatment rejuvenates it."

Comments from Trudy

Gertrude Hemken, of Chicago, writes: "I want to compliment you on your cover for February. Lady Fulvia looks really natural—like a color-tinted photo. I can't say much about the lepers, as I have never seen any, much less in such degrees of leprosy. Fra Diavolo doesn't appeal to me so well, but I

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suddenly realize that Finlay is a darn good artist. *The Globe of Memories* was sweetly tragic, so wonderfully satisfying. It left me wordless. Seabury Quinn *can* turn out a good tale without the blond cat of a Frenchman! I am delight'! I can't seem to find words to express my feelings at the tale—it's one of the grandest of its kind that I have ever read. Henry Kuttner turned out a nice-sized tale with his *I, the Vampire*. And a most kind vampire he was, to allow himself to be really killed dead. Seemed he was sorta weary of his semi-living state. I'd be weary too if I lived for centuries and centuries. And thanx, Mr. Kuttner, for turning away from rats for a change. The drawing by Mooney, although containing a touch of the modernistic, was quite in order for the tale. He should be good for certain stories. Howard gives us a death-chilly tale in *Dig Me No Grave*. When I finished, I actually looked up to make sure I was not in that dark room of howling horror. The oriental in the drawing looks quite real. . . . I am pleased with August Derleth this time. *Glory Hand* was so different from his usual theme of ghosts, or avenging souls from the grave. Looks like the li'l Wisconsin boy is improving. I'll be looking for more like it. How awful was *Masquerade*—horrifying! One of those affairs that ya picture yerself at the scene—a witness struck dumb by the sudden events and just staring at an immovable object that was a man. Short but sweet. Bram Stoker proved himself a bit of a humorist in the reprint, *A Gipsy Prophecy*. I enjoyed it. Personally, I would prefer having my fortune told by someone other than a gipsy or an oriental. Both races or tribes give me the willies, and I'm scared silly of either and/or both. . . . Goody, goody, I see Eando Binder are scheduled for next month. Watch me run for the magazine soon's I know it's ready! Thank ya, boys. Thassall—bye bye, until next month."

A Weird Tales Addict

Glenda Lane, of Easton, Pennsylvania, writes: "To Seabury Quinn, orchids! This, my first letter, is prompted solely by his magnificent *Globe of Memories*. I have seldom enjoyed anything so much. However, the same issue includes what I consider the worst and most inappropriate story to date: *The Vaunsburg Plague*. How in the world did *that* yarn manage to worm its way into your usually excellent paper? Tsk! Tsk! And while I'm here I may as well get some other things off my chest. I liked *Glory Hand* immensely, but found *The Poppy Pearl* incoherent and a little silly, in spite of Owen's luscious descriptions. Virgil Finlay's two illustrations for *The Globe of Memories* rather disappointed me—surely Fulvia's costume on the cover is wrong (almost modern except for the hair) and the face of the inner illustration is *much* too big! These are the first slips I've caught him in. You are lucky to have found such an illustrator—and I ought to know because I've studied art since I was old enough to hold a brush—both here and abroad! Finlay's work is as delicate as a diamond-cutter's. . . . All in all, your magazine is really swell—though I sometimes wish it weren't so insidious. Every time I get the creeps (and McClusky's *Crawling Horror* gave them to me for at least a week) I swear I won't buy another copy. And then on the first of every month I find myself inquiring for WT at the news stand. Just an addict—but I like it!"

He's Back Again

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes: "I started the new year off right by reading the latest issue of WEIRD TALES. Here's furthering that start by writing a letter. One of the reasons for wanting to write is Virgil Finlay's cover. At last you have found an artist who really and truly belongs on the cover. Finlay's cover for February is both weird and excellently painted. He deserves the majority of WEIRD's covers. I would like to see, however, occasional ones by St. John, Brundage, and perhaps others. I have always liked Finlay's inside work, but along with it I would like to see some by Napoli. The weirdest tale in the February issue is *Dig Me No Grave*, by Robert E. Howard. Which fact brings home the appalling thought that he can no longer furnish us with such stories. Naturally I enjoyed Quinn's *The Globe of Memories*. May he continue to 'turn 'em out'—both de Grandin and 'independent.' Don't know whether I liked *The Poppy Pearl* or not. Sort of a queer thing. The rest of the tales were quite entertaining."

Lovecraft Reprints

Robert Bloch writes from Milwaukee: "I raise my raucous voice again to request, along with the other readers, a reprinting of

The Picture in the House, by you-know-who. Also his *The Unnamable*, *The Statement of Randolph Carter*, the *Call of Cthulhu*, *The Horror at Red Hook;* these were gems, and are now unobtainable. The success of *Pickman's Model* should be a good criterion of how avidly these reprints would be welcomed. To think that H. P. wrote those magnificent yarns along in the early 1920's and can still turn out top tales like *The Thing on the Door-Step!* Amazing. But please print *The Picture in the House*. It's a honey." [*The Picture in the House* was reprinted in last month's issue. — THE EDITOR.]

Stories of Ancient Times

A. E. Doward, of Bayonne, New Jersey, writes: "I have long been a reader of WEIRD TALES, preferring it to any other magazine on the market. In my opinion it is the best one of its kind, and I seem to be able to get an inner sort of satisfaction from its pages. Although I get keen enjoyment from most of the stories, my favorites are those dealing with very ancient times, preferably of the B. C. period. I wonder if it would not be a good idea to create a new magazine dealing with just those times alone, as a sort of subsidiary to WEIRD TALES. I am sure that if this suggestion were put in the Eyrie, it would gain considerable support."

Fate Weaves a Web

Robert A. Madle, of Philadelphia, writes: "Glad to see a cover by Brundage graces the January number, instead of J. Allen St. John. Not that I consider St. John's drawings poor, but that I think Mrs. Brundage's crayon sketches are more beautifully done. However, I am expecting Virgil Finlay's forthcoming cover to surpass even Brundage's designs. I think *Fate Weaves a Web* by Alfred I. Tooke was the outstanding story this month. Mr. Tooke has written a very clever piece of fiction, one that I will remember for a long time. H. P. Lovecraft, as usual, turned out an excellent tale, with the horror element prevailing. More of this type will be welcome."

A Realistic Cover

Julius Hopkins, of Washington, D. C., writes: "The first thing that struck my fancy, when I received the February WT, was the

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superb illustration on the cover. You had warned us in advance that Virgil Finlay would do the cover for this issue, so I actually held my breath as I slid the wrapper off the magazine. When I beheld the illustration, I almost gasped because it looked so life-like. Frankly, I think it is one of the best covers that WT has ever had. In the corpse-like figures we see horror; in the strong young man we see power; in the gorgeous young lady we see beauty. So, we have pictured for us three main types of weird stories, namely: horror, power, and beauty. I hereby make a motion for more Virgil Finlay cover illustrations as well as continuing his work on the inside. *Dig Me No Grave* by the late Robert E. Howard is my choice for first place. This story is a truly weird tale and the disappearance of both the corpse and the oriental is extremely uncanny. Second place goes to Derleth's *Glory Hand*. It's one of the best short stories I've ever read. The idea of the wishes reminds me of *The Monkey's Paw* by W. W. Jacobs, and the crawling hand recalls to my mind Hugh B. Cave's *The Crawling Curse* published in WT three or four years ago. For third place I pick *Masquerade*, the excellent short short by Mearle Prout. We haven't had many stories of soul transference, so this was eagerly welcomed."

The Odyssey of Conan

E. W. Blossom, of Tampa, Florida, writes: "I have been a reader of WT for many years; in fact I believe since the first publication thereof, but this is the first time I have attempted to break into its company of distinguished and macabre authors. I was sorry indeed to learn of the death of Robert E. Howard. His tales of Conan and his adventures were almost an odyssey and the character Conan one of the most charming brutes which fiction has produced."

A Well-Wisher

Claire P. Beck, of Lakeport, California, writes: "For several months I have felt an interest in your publication, and I feel that a small statement of a few reactions will not be amiss. Mr. Virgil Finlay's work has conclusively illustrated its magnificence in the qualities of the cover for your February issue. One has the experience of *seeing* the portrayed fragments nearly as strongly as in the work of any modern artist. Mr. Finlay's portrayal of human flesh, from tan to mummification, is phenomenally realistic. . . . I wish for more paintings by Virgil Finlay, a hasty return of Clark Ashton Smith, and your continued success."

Favorite Authors

Stanley Arnold, of Cannelton, Indiana, writes: "I have been a reader of your magazine for eight years and as this is the only magazine I have consistently read it must be the best out. My favorite authors are H. P. Lovecraft and the late Robert E. Howard. It seems terrible that there will be no new stories of Conan or other creations of Howard's. You can still print a lot of Lovecraft, though. There are two stories in the February issue which I don't like. They are *The Poppy Pearl*, which would be a fine story for an adventure magazine, and *The Vaunsburg Plague*, which has too much 'doom' to the world in it. This last sounded as if it might be written by Edmond Hamilton though it was signed Julius Long. The rest of the issue was great, with *Dig Me No Grave* by Howard taking first place."

On Robert E. Howard

Miss V. Frank, of Gloversville, New York, writes: "It has been a long time since I wrote you a letter so here goes again. First I want to say I actually cried over Robert E. Howard's untimely death. I notice some of the readers want someone else to revive Conan. I say it can't be done! No one could do justice to that grand creature that Robert Howard created. Please don't spoil a perfect memory. Your January issue is grand, but somehow I miss those morbid stories like *The House of the Worm* and *Scarlet Dream* and *Shambleau*. These are the kind of tales that hold your interest and undivided attention."

Paging Doctor Satan

John V. Baltadonis, of Philadelphia, writes: "From the looks of the cover, it seems as if good old WEIRD TALES has started off the new year with a bang! Even though this month's cover is superbly drawn by Brundage, I still find myself all agog and eager to find out how Finlay is on next month's cover. If he is as good on the cover as he is on the interior illustrating—Brundage had better watch her step. If St. John ever does any more covers for your magazine, I hope he equals his cover for the first installment

of *Golden Blood;* that, in my mind, is one neat cover. It's about the best that St. John has ever done. The best story in the issue is McClusky's story, *The Woman in Room 607;* after this comes Paul Ernst's tale, *The Dead Moan Low.* Speaking of Ernst—what happened to Doc Satan? It's been a long time since we've had one of those thrilling 'Ernstales.' I am very eager to find out who Doc Satan is, when he dies, etc. Close to Ernst's tale comes Lovecraft's *The Thing on the Door-Step.* A story of good mention is *The Headless Miller of Kobold's Keep.*"

About Dorothy Quick

Gertrude Munnford, of Plainfield, New Jersey, writes: "Seeing in your current issue a controversy regarding four stories which are tied for second place I am writing to cast my vote for *The Lost Door* by Dorothy Quick. I didn't write before, for I thought surely it would win first place. There is no question that it should, for it is without doubt, in my mind at least, the most unusual and truly weird tale you have published in a long time. Moore writes beautifully, but Moore's stories are all the same pattern, whereas a story like *The Lost Door* is absolutely different and makes one long for more like it. Would appreciate knowing if you will have more stories by Dorothy Quick. I hope so."

A New Dore?

Charles H. Deems, of Batesville, Arkansas, writes: "Peace be unto you; and I hope with this powerful invocation to partially stem the turmoil that will be raging in the Eyrie over Virgil Finlay's cover. Why, it might even be as great as that which raged over his inside illustrations. Of course, one can hardly say that Finlay is a second Gustave Doré when comparing the February cover painting with several of Doré's bizarre creations. But if one can compare a black and white drawing with a painting, then, ah, Finlay compares quite favorably to Doré."

Pointed Paragraphs

Henry Kuttner writes from Beverly Hills, California: "Just got the February WT. That Finlay cover is a knockout! And so is Virgil's illustration for Owen's yarn. In the name of Lucifer, let's have a Finlay cover along the lines of his extraordinary illustration for Bloch's *The Faceless God.*"

NEXT MONTH

The Last Pharaoh

By THOMAS P. KELLEY

OUT of the dark mists of time a strange horror struck at an English girl and her American sweetheart. In a weird castle of doom on the West African coast there befell them an adventure so uncanny, so fraught with ultimate horror, that their minds reeled from the shock of it.

THIS amazing novel weaves a spell around the reader, and casts the glamor of ancient Egypt over the world of our own day. It is a story you will not soon forget. This powerful story will begin

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Arthur L. Widner, Jr., writes from a CCC camp near Waterbury, Vermont: "I hitch-hiked twenty-eight miles in a snowstorm and bought the December copy of WEIRD TALES." [This, we believe, establishes a record of some sort. Have any other readers braved such difficulties to get the magazine? —THE EDITOR.]

Samuel Gordon, of Washington, D. C., writes: "*The Globe of Memories* and *The Poppy Pearl* raise the February number to one of the best you ever printed."

E. M. Stubbs, of Detroit, writes: "The cover by Finlay was superb. Keep him and St. John on the covers. I am glad to see that you are not going to discontinue serials."

Joseph Hatch, of Lawrence, Kansas, writes: "Trudy's (Gertrude Hemken's) letters, I hope, have become a permanent monthly feature in WT. Her half-sarcastic, half-witty, always-interesting letters are the tops—'And Then Some!' Would advise that you list her letter on the contents page in the future, just so I won't have to rummage all through the Eyrie to find it first. My favorites? Thank you for asking, but you see it's impossible for me to fill out that coupon. I tried it once or twice, but it just doesn't work."

John J. Weir, of South Amboy, New Jersey, writes: "Congratulations! What a cover the February issue has! Of course Finlay hasn't made it as weird as St. John's two, but he has combined both beauty and weirdness so that it makes an excellent picture for a magazine of your type. By all means give him more covers."

D. de Woronin, of Bulawayo, South Rhodesia, writes: "Hats off to C. L. Moore for *Lost Paradise,* one of the most exquisite pieces of sheer fantasy I ever had the pleasure of reading."

Your Favorite Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue of WEIRD TALES? Write us a letter, or fill out the coupon at the bottom of this page and send it to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES. Two stories lead the field in popularity among all the stories in our February issue, as shown by your votes and letters. These are *The Globe of Memories,* by Seabury Quinn, and Robert E. Howard's posthumous story, *Dig Me No Grave.*

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE APRIL WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1) ----------	----------
(2) ----------	----------
(3) ----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1) ---------- Why? ----------

(2) ---------- ----------

Reader's name and address:

Fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

COMING NEXT MONTH

I WALKED up the cobbled street, past grim, silent houses that I had known when I was a child. Some hoary evil, I thought again, had come down out of the forests to haunt them, since I had gone.

Gaunt, hoary-headed men peered at me from sagging doors. I knew the names of some; but their dull, rheumy eyes returned my greetings with stares of hostile dread. Even haggard, one-eyed Dud Morrow, the postmaster, who must have handled all my letters to Valyne, and all of hers to me, did not know me until I spoke. Then he started and seemed to shrink from me, as if I had been afflicted with some fearful contagion.

"Valyne Kirk?" he mumbled hastily. "Why, since the old woman died in the summer, she lives at Doctor Kyle's house. Just half a mile up the hill."

He gestured as if to hasten me. And as I went on, I sensed a furtive murmur behind me in the narrow street, as if swift, unpleasant things were whispered.

Valyne had written of her mother's death, but not that she had gone to my foster-father's house. I wondered briefly at her silence.

Up the muddy road I hastened, through gnarled trees older than Creston, toward the house of Doctor Latham Kyle. No need to ask the way! I knew each turning, each battered oak, each moss-stained boulder. But I felt again that some secret evil had come down from the hills, to grasp this vale in tentacles of slithering horror. . . .

What this strange secret evil was, and how it enmeshed the beautiful Valyne Kirk and her sweetheart in its brooding mystery, will be told in a fascinating novelette by the author of *Golden Blood*. You cannot afford to miss this gripping tale of weird horror, which will be printed complete in next month's WEIRD TALES:

The Mark of the Monster

By Jack Williamson

——Also——

THE SALEM HORROR

By HENRY KUTTNER

A ghastly horror from the witchcraft days of three centuries ago reared its dreadful form in the Witch Room of that old house in Derby Street.

DUAR THE ACCURSED

By CLIFFORD BALL

A surprizing tale about the Black Tower and the intrusion of a barbarian adventurer—a strange weird tale of the love of a queen for her enemy.

THE LAST PHARAOH

By THOMAS P. KELLEY

A strange weird story of a castle of doom on the West African coast—an unbelievably fascinating tale of an English girl and her American sweetheart, and the amazing fate that befell them.

THE HORROR IN THE BURYING-GROUND

By HAZEL HEALD

A bizarre and outré story of a gruesome happening in the old town of Stillwater—a blood-chilling tale of a double burial.

THE WIND FROM THE RIVER

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

The mystery of Arthur Grandison's violent death was solved one eery night, when the wind blew strong from the river.

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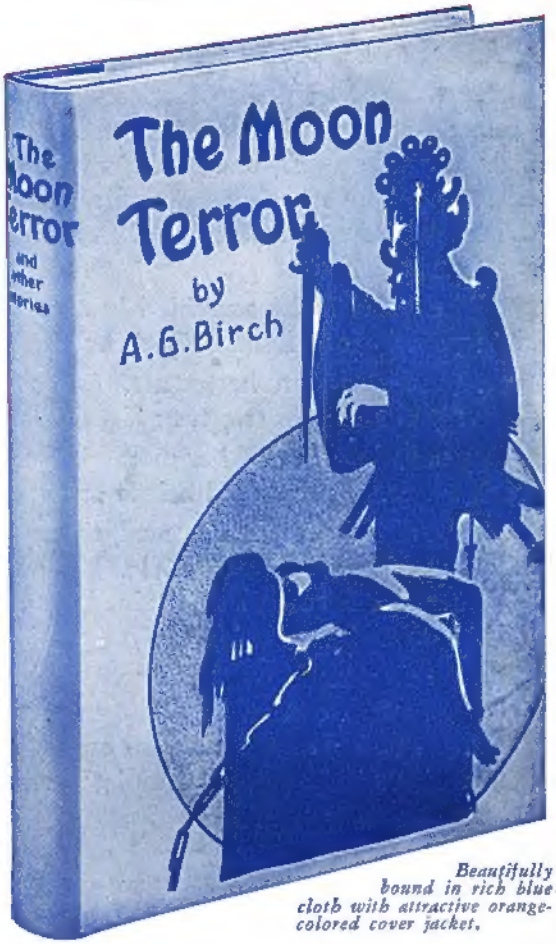

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